

THE CLASSIC ADVENTURER

MAGNIFICENT SCROLLS

THE QUEEN OF ADVENTURES ANITA SINCLAIR UNWRAPS THE MAGNETIC SCROLLS TREASURE

THE ART OF TERRY GREER

A CELEBRATION OF ARTWORK FROM ONE OF THE INDUSTRY'S FINEST ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATORS

ON THE 8TH DAY

MICHAEL WHITE AND GARY KELBRICK CREATED A LABEL RENOWNED FOR LOW PRICE, HIGH QUALITY GAMES

TEA WITH THE ROCHDALE BALROG

CATS, BALROGS, AND GETTING STUCK IN THE SMALLEST ROOM IN HOUSE WITH JOHN WILSON OF ZENOBI

FISHY BUSINESS

HOW PHIL SOUTH MADE A SPLASH WRITING THE SURREAL MAGNETIC SCROLLS MASTERPIECE

MOSAIC SOFTWARE

VICKY CARNE PIECES TOGETHER HER CAREER AND THE POPULAR BOOKWARE GENRE



THE CLASSIC ADVENTURER

I owned an Acorn Electron as a kid. It wasn't the greatest games machine in the playground, but it did have the best game of all-time, Braben and Bell's *Elite*, and one of the best adventure games of all time, Trevor Hall's *Twin Kingdom Valley*.

For a boy with a fertile imagination, and an obsession with the Fighting Fantasy books, *Twin Kingdom Valley* whisked me through the screen, and into a fantasy world of babbling brooks, Forests, Orcs, Trolls, Goblins, Dragons, Kings and treasure!

I played as many adventures as I could, but it wasn't until I owned a ZX Spectrum and Fergus McNeill's *The Big Sleaze* that I encountered the same immersion with another game. A friend and I spent many weekends hunched over the keyboard, notepad and pen, determined that Sam Spillade would find the missing Maltese Bullfinch.

I'm therefore delighted that both Fergus and Trevor feature in this celebration of classic adventure games, along with many other adventures and authors that transported legions of other kids to far flung corners of their own imagination.

Mark James Hardisty, 2018

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BRIAN HOWARTH

One of Britain's most prolific adventure authors, **Brian Howarth** was entrusted to port Scott Adams's epic catalogue for Adventure International UK, and created the well-loved series of *Mysterious Adventures*.

Brian Howarth started his career as a telephone engineer. He spent his evenings delving into the world of adventuring by playing Dungeons and Dragons and watching *The Adventure Game* - a BBC television series that first aired on the BBC in May 1980. The Adventure Game blurred the physical and digital world with green-screen computerised puzzles, and was an early attempt at augmented reality. 'It wasn't until I saw that programme that I realised the potential for computer moderated adventures', Brian enthused to *Home Computing Weekly*.

He bought the only home computer he could find, a TRS-80 from Radio Shack and quickly discovered Scott Adams' series of games. He was hooked, enjoying the games so much that he desperately wanted to write his own. He made a start in BASIC, but quickly filled the limited memory of the TRS-80, realising that his ambition couldn't be matched unless he switched to writing in more efficient machine code. Six frustrating months later, he had made progress, telling Jacob Gunness in August 2003, that "machine code was clearly the way to go, but [it] represented a steep learning curve to me. I found a

ARG'S ANCESTRY

The BBC cult classic, *The Adventure Game*, was first broadcast in 1980. It featured a dizzy mix of computer generated puzzles and augmented reality [such as *The Vortex*] and owed its creation to the original *Adventure*, better known as *Colossal Caves*.

The series producer, Patrick Dowling was a 25-year veteran of the BBC having slowly worked his way through the ranks of children's TV. In 1977 he had been impressed with the classic *Adventure*, and thought that the way players progressed via a range of puzzles and clues could be translated onto the TV screen.

It was the influence of Douglas Adams and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* that gave *The Adventure Game* its intergalactic themes.

good book, Microsoft Assembler, and then proceeded to burn many midnight oils learning how to code in assembly language." At the end of the six months, he had "stumbled" towards a functional version of his first adventure, and called it *The Golden Baton*.

He hoped to sell it, and submitted *The Golden Baton* for publication with Molimerx, a company in Bexhill-On-Sea in Sussex who were already releasing games for the TRS-80 machine. He received an enthusiastic response. Brian explained to Guinness, "to my delight and surprise, Mr. A.J. Harding [...] contacted me with a publishing contract proposal, along with a definite interest in creating a series if I felt the capacity to create more."

The Golden Baton was released in 1981, on cassette and disk and sold well, even being published in the US under the confusingly named Acorn Software Products label. Molimerx and its proprietor Mr Harding pressed Brian for more games in the newly dubbed *Mysterious Adventures* series, and he duly found time in-between writing a prescription labelling software package for a local chemist, to deliver *The Time Machine* and *Arrow Of Death*, a game in two parts.

Around the same time, Mike Woodroffe, who owned a popular computer store in Birmingham called Callisto Computers was having the same thought processes as many early computer entrepreneurs and wanted to get into games publishing. He told Retro Gamer, "The computer shop was the catalyst really. [...] Although we were selling Apple IIs, we found that there was a very big demand for software, but the only place we could really get a good supply was in America. [...] One of the firms we approached was Adventure International. I had a good talk with Scott [Adams] and we struck a deal."

Looking beyond a straight import-and-publish deal, Mike and Scott thought that it would be more cost-effective to bring the manufacturing processes to Britain instead of paying the high cost in time and shipping of getting bulky boxes over from the States. Mike told Your Computer "we were paying to fly blocks of polystyrene over the Atlantic. Scott suggested we set up our own duplication operation here." As well as selling the games for the TRS-80, there was a market to port the games to the emerging home computers that were starting to appear across Europe. Adams' games were incompatible with machines such as the BBC, Spectrum and the like, so converting the games to other formats would widen their profitability. Woodroffe was interviewed for a magazine, discussing the potential of ports, and admitted to the press that he didn't have anyone that could handle the conversions. In a large dollop of serendipity Brian Howarth had read the article and contacted Woodroffe to offer his services.

Mike befittingly accepted, and he formed a new company called Adventure International UK (AIUK), with permission from Adventure International in the States to use the same corporate name. For all intents and purposes it was recognised as the UK branch of Scott's

business, but in financial and management terms it was a very independent entity.

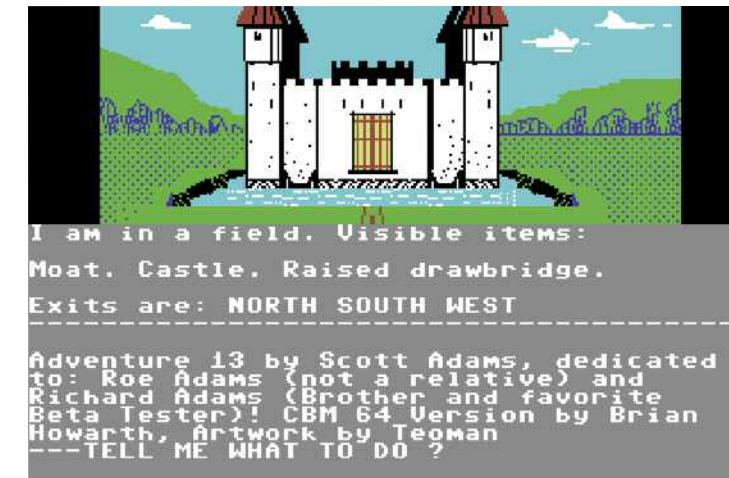
Brian started as a freelance coder in new AIUK offices above the Callisto Computers shop. He set to work examining Adams' existing interpreter for the TRS-80 and compared it to his own evolving engine. The process was made easier by reading a Byte Magazine article, where the *Adventureland* source had been published and the method of working with Adams' adventure databases had been analysed and documented. Howarth soon realised that it wouldn't take much work to bring the two in-line with each other to create a better development environment and interpreter for European machines. He explained to Guinness, "It became clear to us that if I could adapt my code to be able to interpret the Scott Adams data files, we would also be able to use the editor to allow non-programmers to write our own adventure data files."

It was a painless process and before long he had an adapted codebase that could pull data from Scott's existing database, and be used to create future adventures with ease. His passion for the project was clear and the resultant engine and games were polished, fast and responsive. He told Retro Gamer, "I had fun playing Scott Adams's games [and] liked the 'split screen' format where descriptions were displayed in the top portion of the screen and the responses of the player and computers were displayed in the lower half." In the new engine the top half of the screen for each adventure was changed to include graphics. Text-based adventures no longer sold well, and Mike took the decision to hire talented artist Teoman Irmak to produce graphics.

Howarth spent most of 1983 and 1984 converting Adams' adventures to a wide range of machines, including the Commodore C16, BBC, Spectrum, Commodore 64 and Atari computers. He had the chance to meet Scott himself at CES, when Adams came to the UK on a publicity tour, but the opportunities for collaboration was limited. *Adventureland*, *Pirate Adventure* and *Secret Mission* were just some of Scott's original series that were ported. Several new additions to the Adventure International catalogue, including *The Sorcerer of Claymorgue Castle* were also converted. The process for newly developed games to be brought to England started with Scott writing out the main story. The adventure was then mastered by Ken McNair in Florida using an Apple II computer, and the plot and source disks sent to Birmingham for Britain to convert to the 8-bit European machines using his engine.

After working together, Teoman and Brian modified the graphics capabilities of the interpreter removing the very slow high-definition line and spill-fill routine. In its place they implemented an innovative dynamic character-set based routine, that could draw graphics instantly without compromising the quality of the image. *Claymorgue* was one of the first games to receive this upgrade, and was well received in the press. It's still a standout title, even though one of Adams' more difficult games. Crash magazine highlighted at the time what had become to be expected from a "highly regarded force in adventure publishing", noting its "superb [and] racy response [that] give the game the edge."

Things were looking rosy for the partnership, but unfortunately it seems there was some disagreement between AIUK and Brian. According to The Classic Adventures Solution Archive, the dispute was down to an invoicing error, but whatever, it coincided with him severing his links with Molimerx too and setting up his own company called Digital Fantasia. Brian had become disillusioned with the publishing company, and their refusal to convert games to other formats. Fantasia, with his home in Norbreck in Blackpool was the perfect vehicle to expand on the *Mysterious Adventures* collection. Together with co-author and friend Wherner Barnes he increased the total number of titles in the series to 11. In chronological order, they were *Escape from Pulsar 7*, *Circus, The Feasibility Experiment*, *The Wizard of Akyrz*, *Perseus and Andromeda*, *Ten Little Indians* and *Waxworks*. By the end of 1983 he had converted his original *Mysterious Adventures* games to the new formats and included graphics, albeit of a basic standard. He told Home Computing Weekly "it seems to be what the new market wants, but [including graphics] must not be at the expense of the plot."



[**The Sorcerer Of Claymorgue Castle**] A trademark fantasy yarn from Scott Adams. You play Beanwick, a wizards apprentice tasked with stealing the stars of power from the evil Vileeroth. *Claymorgue* is a cracking conversion from Brian, and a popular title for Adventure International - one of their most recognisable adventures.



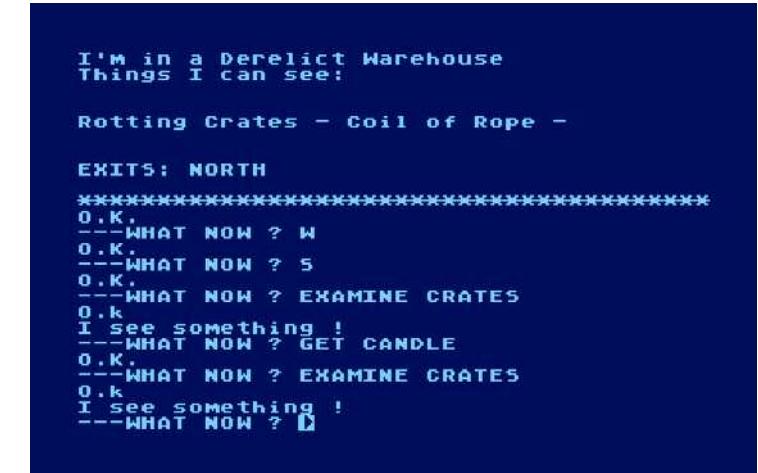
[**Adventureland**] *Adventureland* is the first game from Adventure International UK to use Brian's port of Scott Adams' adventure interpreter to British hardware. It's the archetypal classic adventure of dragons, mazes, magic carpets, lamps and treasure.



[**Gremlins**] This licence was a coup for Mike Woodroffe, and Brian didn't let him down with this humorous and enjoyable adaptation. It's not the most taxing of games, but that's a positive, allowing the novice to find ways of disposing of the gruesome critters.



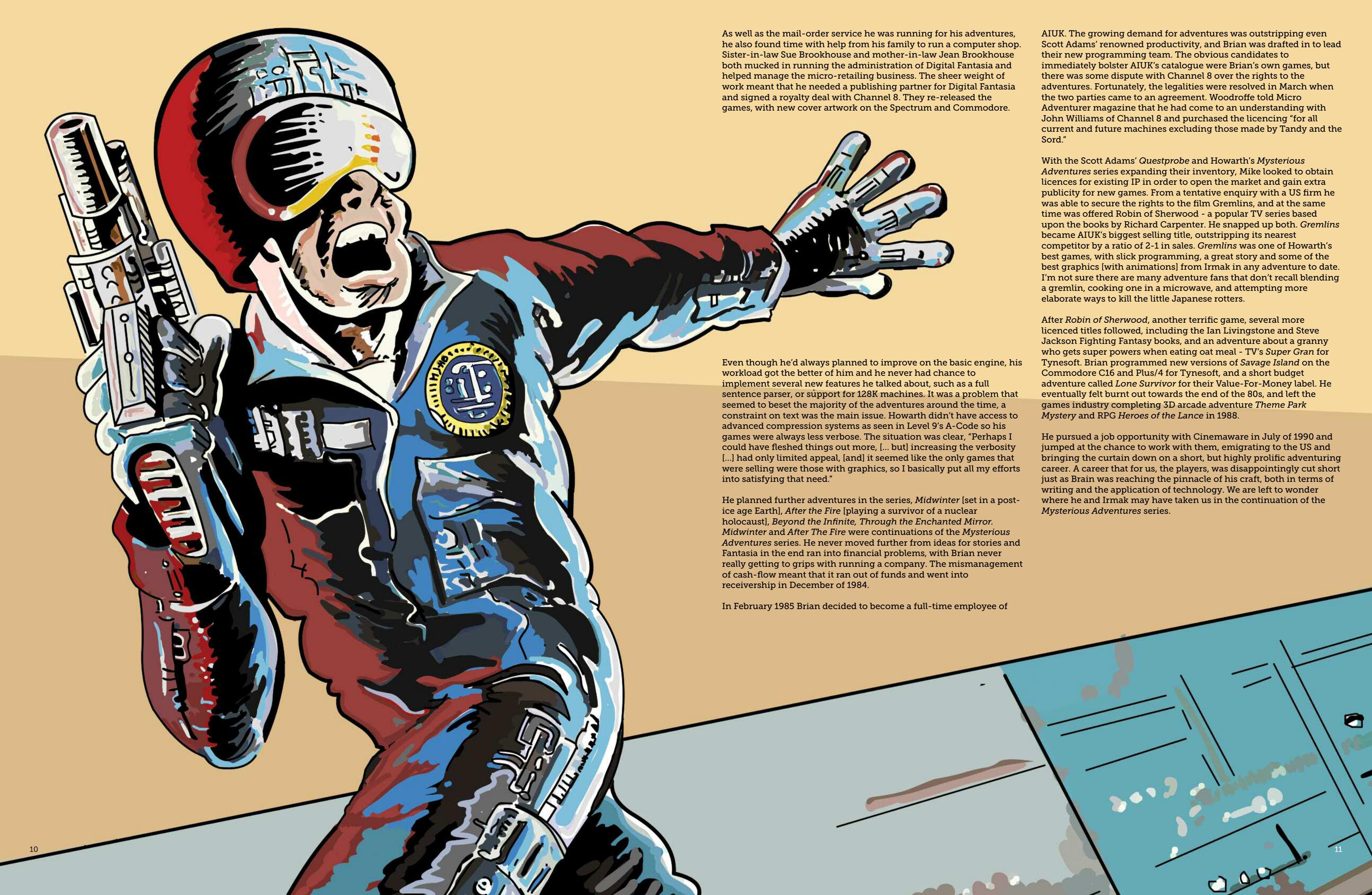
[**Escape from Pulsar 7**] Brian, alongside Wherner Barnes created *Pulsar 7* named after the freighter upon which the game is set. It's returning from an exploratory mission complete with a mysterious alien on board. A little clichéd, perhaps, but *Pulsar* is fast-paced, and programmed with Brian's usual attention to detail.



[**Ten Little Indians**] Tenth in the *Mysterious Adventure* series, *Ten Little Indians* is one of the best, with a terrifically tense opening set-piece and a thrilling plot, seeing the player hunt down ten small gold figurines, stashed away by the late Major Johnston-Smythe.



[**Robin of Sherwood**] Brian was getting into his stride in the final year of AIUK. *Robin of Sherwood* was a tour-de-force of his writing talent and Teoman Irmak's terrific artwork. A fun game, superbly written and atmospheric, with an imaginative plot.



As well as the mail-order service he was running for his adventures, he also found time with help from his family to run a computer shop. Sister-in-law Sue Brookhouse and mother-in-law Jean Brookhouse both mucked in running the administration of Digital Fantasia and helped manage the micro-retailing business. The sheer weight of work meant that he needed a publishing partner for Digital Fantasia and signed a royalty deal with Channel 8. They re-released the games, with new cover artwork on the Spectrum and Commodore.

AIUK. The growing demand for adventures was outstripping even Scott Adams' renowned productivity, and Brian was drafted in to lead their new programming team. The obvious candidates to immediately bolster AIUK's catalogue were Brian's own games, but there was some dispute with Channel 8 over the rights to the adventures. Fortunately, the legalities were resolved in March when the two parties came to an agreement. Woodroffe told Micro Adventurer magazine that he had come to an understanding with John Williams of Channel 8 and purchased the licencing "for all current and future machines excluding those made by Tandy and the Sord."

With the Scott Adams' Questprobe and Howarth's Mysterious Adventures series expanding their inventory, Mike looked to obtain licences for existing IP in order to open the market and gain extra publicity for new games. From a tentative enquiry with a US firm he was able to secure the rights to the film Gremlins, and at the same time was offered Robin of Sherwood - a popular TV series based upon the books by Richard Carpenter. He snapped up both. *Gremlins* became AIUK's biggest selling title, outstripping its nearest competitor by a ratio of 2-1 in sales. *Gremlins* was one of Howarth's best games, with slick programming, a great story and some of the best graphics [with animations] from Irmak in any adventure to date. I'm not sure there are many adventure fans that don't recall blending a gremlin, cooking one in a microwave, and attempting more elaborate ways to kill the little Japanese rotters.

After *Robin of Sherwood*, another terrific game, several more licenced titles followed, including the Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson Fighting Fantasy books, and an adventure about a granny who gets super powers when eating oat meal - TV's *Super Gran* for Tynesoft. Brian programmed new versions of *Savage Island* on the Commodore C16 and Plus/4 for Tynesoft, and a short budget adventure called *Lone Survivor* for their Value-For-Money label. He eventually felt burnt out towards the end of the 80s, and left the games industry completing 3D arcade adventure *Theme Park Mystery* and RPG *Heroes of the Lance* in 1988.

He pursued a job opportunity with Cinemaware in July of 1990 and jumped at the chance to work with them, emigrating to the US and bringing the curtain down on a short, but highly prolific adventuring career. A career that for us, the players, was disappointingly cut short just as Brain was reaching the pinnacle of his craft, both in terms of writing and the application of technology. We are left to wonder where he and Irmak may have taken us in the continuation of the Mysterious Adventures series.

Even though he'd always planned to improve on the basic engine, his workload got the better of him and he never had chance to implement several new features he talked about, such as a full sentence parser, or support for 128K machines. It was a problem that seemed to beset the majority of the adventures around the time, a constraint on text was the main issue. Howarth didn't have access to advanced compression systems as seen in Level 9's A-Code so his games were always less verbose. The situation was clear, "Perhaps I could have fleshed things out more, [...] but increasing the verbosity [...] had only limited appeal, [and] it seemed like the only games that were selling were those with graphics, so I basically put all my efforts into satisfying that need."

He planned further adventures in the series, *Midwinter* [set in a post-ice age Earth], *After the Fire* [playing a survivor of a nuclear holocaust], *Beyond the Infinite*, *Through the Enchanted Mirror*. *Midwinter* and *After The Fire* were continuations of the Mysterious Adventures series. He never moved further from ideas for stories and Fantasia in the end ran into financial problems, with Brian never really getting to grips with running a company. The mismanagement of cash-flow meant that it ran out of funds and went into receivership in December of 1984.

In February 1985 Brian decided to become a full-time employee of



Author: Nick Montfort
Publisher: The MIT Press
RRP: £14.95
Buy it from: Amazon
Website: <http://www.nickm.com>

TWISTY LITTLE PASSAGES

Named after the iconic maze descriptions in *Adventure*, Nick Montfort's *Twisty Little Passages* is an academic evaluation of text adventuring.

Nick Montfort is a Professor of Digital Media at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His occupation betrays the writing style and prose found in *Twisty Little Passages*' pages. It's a very academic piece whose summary reads "a critical approach to interactive fiction, as literature and game". It's a title befitting anyone's final year dissertation when they're trying to justify the contents to a baffled lecturer.

Twisty Little Passages, or *Passages* for short, starts with a look at the very early influences on the genre, including the obligatory mention of Dungeons and Dragons, then moves through time formulaically and predictably, covering the classic *Adventure*, early Infocom titles, middle Infocom titles, and late Infocom titles - yes a lot of Infocom, but more on that later. The first few chapters, "The pleasure of the text adventure", and "Riddles" for example, seem somewhat unnecessary. There's a lot of "teaching your grandma to suck eggs", in the form of how games actually work, the verb/noun inputs, a couple of maps (the only illustrations in the book) and in general how an adventure game can be played. Even in 2005 when the book was first published I'm not sure it was necessary. There's a feeling that the text is aimed at dusty old MIT English Professors who have never seen a computer, let alone played with one of those new-fangled typewriter things.

Most titles get a functional and clinical breakdown and analysis. The text does occasionally show some dry humour, but it's scant, few and fair between. There's a great deal of background detail explored by Monfort in a very objective manner, and there's no doubting his passion for the subject. It's just very US-centric. That's no surprise really as the book does originate in the States and published by MIT Press themselves, so the end probably has justified the means. We have to remember that gaming in the 80s was a very isolated affair. Very few of Europe's major games made a breakthrough across the pond - and we're talking about huge arcade and action games here, not just the niche adventure market. There's a feeling though, that the author could have cast more of a

gaze away from his own shores. For example, *The Hobbit*, with its million selling significance barely gets a mention. Monfort gives the game around three quarters of a page of text, fails to acknowledge Veronika Megler as the main co-author and leaves a rather tepid and understated summary of the game-changing title: "*The Hobbit* was a standout in the text-and-graphics category and became quite popular." Quite.

All of this comes in a chapter called "Different Visions Worldwide". There's passing mention of British games, *The Quill*, *Acheton* and *The Boggit* are three that I noticed are name checked. The best British coverage is dedicated to Magnetic Scrolls and Level 9 – perhaps because these companies were the most-Infocom like? Who knows?

Now back to the Infocom Elephant in the room. Almost a third of the book is given over to the Massachusetts company - and for reasons given previous you can't really argue with that if it ensured the book made it to print. Only the potential buyer can determine whether *Zork* and its endless incarnations really require the print dedicated to it.

For a casual British reader it's hard to recommend. *Passages* is clearly presented in a neat typeface, with a beautifully understated cover, but inside is devoid of any illustrations or graphics from the games at all. At times it's hard going, but if you have the capacity, and you're interested in a more academic appraisal of the medium (as long as they're from Infocom) then you'll find some interest in its pages.

As an aside, Monfort is amassing an intriguing collection of work. In print "10 PRINT", a book about a one-line Commodore 64 BASIC program, and "Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System" are well worth checking out. There's also his fascinating work with computer generated exhibitions and computer generated books including "Running All Night", a 128-byte Commodore 64 program that functions as a clock or timer, and Synchrony, a series of creative demo parties.

ANITA SINCLAIR

From a girl in love with microelectronics to the Queen of Adventures, Anita Sinclair and Magnetic Scrolls blazed a trail of strong narratives, cutting-edge parsers and exquisite graphics.

[Anita] I was brought up in a very upper-middle class background and the expectation was that I'd go to finishing school and become married. My father was a lot older than my mother and myself, and he was brought up in a generation where girls married and men worked. He was never unsupportive of me, let's say that for certain, but he was not the, you know, oh my god you love soldering irons lets buy you an electronics kit kind of guy. I would save up my pocket money and go up to Tottenham Court Road when I was 13 or 14 and hang out in Marshalls Electronics and all sorts of weird places. I'd buy random components because they looked interesting and try and work out what they did. Had I been born twenty years earlier I'd have found my way into electronics, but because I was born fantastically luckily at the beginning of the computer age programming was much more my skill than designing circuitry.

Anita left school at 15, and her family moved to London. The young teenager soon made friends, one of whom ran their own computer shop. It was the perfect job for the technology-obsessed girl.

[The shop was on] Edgware Road [and] was called CompShop. I very quickly became fascinated with computers that were just emerging at that moment. He and I took over the shop for a year, though it felt



like ten years at the time, and we basically sold computers; Apple IIs, the Commodore PET, and some computer kits – gosh, everything we could do, we sold.

It was in the early days of affordable home computer so machines were ludicrously expensive. The only home micros within reach for the masses were build-it-yourself kits such as the Ohio Superboard – a single board micro you had to solder together, equipped with a small amount of RAM and a 6502 CPU.

I built one of those. Mine was amazing, I wished I'd kept it. It's one of my big regrets in life that I lost it at some point. I lived in a tiny apartment, and this thing was spread out all over the floor. It was hand-soldered by me, with wires. Everything I learnt about programming it was on that machine. A 6502 programmer - that was me.

Bitten by the programming bug, Anita became proficient in 6502 Assembler and began to code small games. She worked for small, local businesses as a freelance programmer, and during this time

met Tony Lambert, who in turn introduced her to a younger friend called Ken Gordon. She was 18, and Ken on the cusp of leaving school. "When [Ken] was leaving school, he decided he wanted to write software" Anita told Mike Gerrard in Your Computer in 1988, "I'd been writing software too, [...] so we decided to do something together."

They had a kindred love for computers, games and the emerging adventure genre. The Infocom adventures captivated them, and through their love of the Massachusetts outfit's games and the adventuring scene Ken introduced her to another of his school friends, Hugh Steers.

I played all the Infocom games as they came out and absolutely loved them. They were fantastic. We wanted to write a game, [but] we weren't certain that we wanted to write an adventure game. There was a game out at the time called *Hack*, that was a Unix based game, and I wanted to go a graphical version of that, because I thought it was amazing. Ken was kind of ambivalent, but Hugh really wanted to write a parser. Once he got his teeth into his parser and showed me

what it could do – which was amazing at that time, [so] it was a no brainer that we should write adventure games.

Ken and Hugh introduced Anita to another classmate, Rob Steggles. Rob had latched onto the two computer whizz-kids at school, and all three played Dungeons and Dragons, Zork and the Scott Adams adventures together.

Rob had a wonderful literary turn of mind and could come up with puzzles and good stuff. So, our team was complete. Hugh writing the parser, Ken writing the surrounds of it, and Rob was writing the actual adventure game, the text, the puzzles, the story, and then me. I was writing games quick and dirty just to generate some money so the company could keep going. Until *The Pawn* came out we had no money, we literally had no money so we would do anything we could to generate a bit of cash to pay for the computers, the office, and whatever else. Luckily Ken and Hugh lived with their parents, and they were very generous.

They setup shop in a small office in Eltham in south-east London.

Along with the freelance work, rumoured to be several unattributed arcade games written by Anita, they coded their first exploratory adventure together. Magazines of the time ran with a story about a rather risqué game called *The Willy Affair*. With Ken and Hugh in the midst of their final A-Levels, they laboured through the night, ironically before the Computer Science examinations to create an adventure in which a limp and then subsequent erect "willy" played a large, ahem, part. The racy subject matter was apparently down to Anita's substitution of said phallic-term when she couldn't think of the word she wanted. "So if I say to someone 'Can you pass me the Willy', anyone who knows me will know I mean the coffee cup or the box of disks or whatever" she embarrassingly told Your Computer.

It sounds just like me. I can imagine myself saying that, but no I don't remember *The Willy Affair*. Sorry about that, there's no sneak preview of *The Willy Affair*. I'm capable of saying most things.

Whether true or not, the embryonic growth and development of their team continued, and the roots of what would become *The Pawn* started with the development of a set of adventure writing utilities





powered by Hugh's parser and written on his ageing TRS-80.

The cutting-edge development dreams were answered on 12 January 1984 when Sir Clive Sinclair presented the new Sinclair QL Professional Computer from a typically extravagant launch event held at the Intercontinental Hotel in London. The QL was the next big thing for Sinclair, with advanced features designed for business, and architecture that made use of powerful 16 and 32-bit CPUs.

There's no doubt that launch titles for the QL would have generated plenty of publicity, but for Anita and Magnetic Scrolls, the reason that they adopted Clive's new toy as their development and target machines was much simpler: She had friends in high places.

[...] It was because they were free. Because Clive Sinclair who was a friend of mine, and is still a friend of mine, gave me a bunch of them. [...] Clive] was an incredibly clever man, and could see the future in a way that other people couldn't see the future. What he was really good at was sketching out the future and then letting other people handle the details. He would get very obsessed with things. On the QL he was completely obsessed with the Microdrives, and I kept saying to him that the Microdrives were crap - can't I have a 5 1/2" floppy disk? You desperately wanted a disk, you know, doing anything on a computer without random-access was tricky. He'd be saying, no, no, no, the Microdrives are fine and I'd be sitting there staring at a pile of tape spewing all over the office crying, because you'd just lost ten hours of work.

Clive Sinclair's prickly personality and combative management style was always a popular topic for industry discussion, and was dramatised in 2009 with a one-off BBC television show called *Micro Men*. It portrayed the legendary inventor and his battles with ex-employee Chris Curry who were pitched into open microcomputer warfare when Curry setup Acorn Computers to rival Sir Clive's Sinclair Research. *Micro Men* showed Clive Sinclair's obsession with the C5 electric car, and his thoughts towards the Spectrum computer and its games – a frivolous sideshow to his real business. One scene, with Alexander Armstrong playing Clive, went thus: "Games, games, games, everywhere I go, games. This is what my lifetime of achievement has been reduced to. Clive Sinclair, the man who brought you *Jet Set fucking Willy*".

[...] Clive was very much a hardware person, and I was a software person. If he had come out with a QL with a proper keyboard and a 5 1/2" floppy disk it would have been the most successful computer ever made. I kept saying, look, all these people want computers in their offices, and not toys, they want computers that do jobs. But that was Clive, and he could see other things that I couldn't, and that's fine. Certainly, [he was] someone who I could count on if I needed to be taken out for dinner one night, I knew that Clive was always there for me. Clive gave us a whole pile of QLs, and so we used them to develop the game. We were just focused, we'll do a QL game [...] and then the money for that will allow us to port it to other devices.

Using the new machines, Hugh and Ken evolved their adventure writing tools to use the QL's 68000 CPU, and called the new suite of utilities simply *The System*. It was text-based, akin to *TADS* or *INFORM* today, where the databases of objects, rooms, NPCs and their attributes were defined and then compiled into their own language, named, tongue-in-cheek, Extra Low Tech Highly Ambiguous Metacode – or ELTHAM for short. It was an audacious and sophisticated beginning from a team that consisted of a group teenagers. Anita is adamant that age wasn't a restriction or barrier, but instead grounds for success built upon their enthusiasm, motivation, creativity and power of youth. Ambition and confidence, it seemed, were the DNA and building blocks of Anita Sinclair.

I certainly would never do anything without an intention of becoming something real. We all felt really strongly that we had

[Opposite] Princes, Princesses, Devils, Wizards and surreal characters of Kervonia adorned a beautiful poster included with *The Pawn*.

QL PAWN

In the dying days of the QL computer, Sinclair Research did publish *QL-Pawn*, packaged in their trademark silver box with the game on two of the much maligned microdrives.

something special, we really did feel that. Something special that people would want to buy. We didn't actually form the company until a bit later, because we couldn't afford to, but it was seen as a company between me, Hugh and Ken.

With her strong industry links and the game running on the QL Anita thought that her namesake would help to publish the games though his software labels or via contacts in the industry. But, Sinclair Research had problems, and the troubled production of the computer resulted in financial difficulties.

The failure to find a market for the C5 electric car deepened their cash flow woes, and the Sinclair route to market for Anita looked to be closed. As one door closed, another opened, and Anita was introduced to Tony Rainbird, the charismatic head of Telecomsoft's new Firebird label.

Tony was a huge influence on us. He's still a very good friend of mine. It came about because of a character called Jez San. Jez was a friend of ours, since everyone was a friend of everyone's back then, and Jez had a contract with Rainbird, well with Firebird as it was then, with *Starglider*. Jez said to us that we had to meet Tony Rainbird, so I took it upon myself to do that, and showed Tony a demo of [*The Pawn*] on the QL. He was bright enough to realise we had something and if he could get what we had then it would be a good thing.

By chance rather than design, as it had been with the QL, the evolution of brand new technology steered the path of Magnetic Scrolls. Atari showcased the ST at the Consumer Electronics Show in January of 1985, and brought it market in June. The ST boasted the same 68000 chipset as the QL, but with 512K of RAM, superior graphics, and to answer Anita's dreams – an industry standard 3.5" floppy disk drive.

[The ST] became our focus. Of course, with the STs came the graphics. That then changed the nature of [our] games [which] originally were going to be text-only adventures and then they became text and graphic adventures. We had to design user interfaces, and that became quite fun, I got into that. The way that the graphics scrolled was great fun to do.

After being almost instantly forgotten on the QL, the ST version of *The Pawn* thrust Magnetic Scrolls back into the limelight. The castle courtyard or snowman graphics were seen running on shop demo machines up and down the country, and featured in the pages of every newsstand print magazine. It had the wow factor, the killer app appeal, and brought into sharp focus the technology leap from 8-bit machines to their new 16-bit overlords.

The team had gone into full brainstorming mode to create *The Pawn*. Rob jotted his extensive ideas onto reams of A1 sized paper and took it to the office. Anita, Ken and Hugh all mucked in with plot and puzzle ideas.

[*The Pawn*] was all Rob, though we did sit around and talk about it. 75% Rob and 25% Hugh and Ken and maybe an extra 2% from me occasionally. It was their idea, and their game.

The name was concocted by Tony, describing the player in the game as a pawn, in constant bewilderment and manipulated by events happening all around him.

It was Tony's only considerable contribution to the project, though he gets a "special" mention in the credits for creating a "silly room"

location. After being one of the initial members of the team, he quickly left, moving onto other things.

Tony's heart wasn't in it. When there's a whole group of young people flying around trying to play with computers because they were amazing – but people came in and left. Not in a nasty fashion, they'd come in and try some stuff, but then they'd get another thought go and do other stuff.

The Pawn, released in 1986, was set in mythical Kerovnia, a world in turmoil from the power struggle caused by its waning King. You started the game wearing a wristband, unable to break free from Kerovnia, unable to pass its borders still wearing it. It was a game of kidnapped princesses, useless princes, sub-plots, dragons, hobbits, trowels and, bizarrely, a character called Jerry Lee Lewis whom you bribed with beer.

Anita set the scene to C&VG magazine: "You wake up one morning to find yourself out in the middle of a field of flowers. It's pretty and all, but not exactly what you've come to expect at 8am. You need to remove the bracelet someone has popped on your wrist, but the problem is that it won't come off. In fact, only one person can remove it, so you need to search and find him or her in order to get home".

Despite its gravitas, *The Pawn* remained a flawed adventure, and felt more like a technology demo than an airtight, highly polished adventure. Some puzzles were obscure, created solely to make use of the parser, and the characters certainly felt as they'd been dropped in for comedic effect, rather than knitted into the fabric of the plot. The Scrolls team were attempting to find their feet, both as writers and technology creators.

I think so. We had to do everything from scratch, you know? We had to invent everything within that game, and there was only three of us and Rob. There's only so much time you've got to think about things like gameplay, and also stories and structure doesn't naturally come when you're trying to program. By the time we had *Guild of Thieves*, we had a game engine and then it was easy to work inside that and change things if it wasn't working. *The Pawn* was more an evolution of what we could do. We had an idea for the game and we knew what it was about. We knew we wanted it to be, sarcastic is the wrong word, a slightly piss taking of other games – an anti-game. [...] You've got to imagine a couple of 17-year-old boys, and a 19-year-old girl trying to get things working. We're not going to get it right, first time.

What they did get right was challenging the terrible clichés that existed in adventures. They wanted to drag the genre forward, offering non-linear puzzle solving, the ability to examine everything (and get a response), and have characters that talked and possessed a good level of intelligence. It's fair to say that the majority of Infocom adventures had already set the benchmarks for most of these qualities, and Anita made no secret of a desire to challenge the US giant head-on and beat them at their own game.

We wanted to be able to model our universe to the best extent that we

THE PRAWN

The send-up of adventures received its own send-up with *The Prawn*, a lampooning text adventure written by Martin Hopkins for the QL.

You play the role of a Prawn who was scooped up in a trawler net and you end up on a strange land, wearing a copper tail-band, which must have been placed on you during your sleep because you cannot remember how it got there.

It's full of detail, good humour, and many recognisable characters from the original QL game.

<http://www.rwapadventures.com/QL/prawn.html>

could give the limitations we had, like the 64K of RAM that we had to play with. It's hard to imagine what we did in such little space back then. We had a really great model, a good parser, the best parser without a doubt that was out there. We had a good database where we could set attributes of things, so we knew that things were. We didn't want to constrain [players] to follow down a path and so they were free to explore and do things in an order they wanted to do things in.

The innovation didn't end with the parser. Anita and Ken updated their development environment from the dodgy Microdrives of the QL to a fully-fledged Mainframe system.

We got a VAX which was amazing, although it had to be hoovered out every so often when it got dusty. We wrote all our own tools, to do everything - we wrote our own language to program in. We did everything from the ground up, they were amazing days. I feel so privileged to have been born when I was born. These days when you want to get into something someone else has got there first. Then we were literally inventing everything, and it was wonderful. You could think, wouldn't it be nice if ... and the next thing you knew you had made it.

The Pawn was a monster hit for Rainbird - it made the label. It received rave reviews across the press, with Keith Campbell commenting specifically on how the fledgling company had set a new standard in adventure creation. "No longer will it be viable to knock out a quick cheap-and-nasty [adventure] with *The Quill*" he noted, "*The Pawn* is so good that to compare it in the same category as many of the adventures on the market [would be unfair]."

After Rainbird and Scrolls' original partnership announcement at the Winter Consumer Electronics Show [CES] in Las Vegas in January of 1986, Anita and Tony returned stateside later in the year to push *The Pawn* at the summer CES event in Chicago. Atari, under the new ownership of Commodore founder Jack Tramiel was treading the boards, heavily promoting its new ST range of computers, keen to maintain its momentum ahead of the Amiga, and boost initial healthy sales. Somehow word had reached Tramiel about this British game impressing everyone at the show, and he was keen to see it for himself.

I remember being at CES and [the Magnetic Scrolls booth] was ten deep in people all of the time. Someone came over to me and said Jack Tramiel, the owner of Atari at the time wants to meet you. I said I'm far too busy - if he wants to see me he'd better come here.

It was an attitude that beautifully encapsulated the astute and headstrong Sinclair - even one of the most powerful men in videogames would have to wait his turn, and was made to wait. But Tramiel couldn't wait, and rushed to meet Anita.

He did, absolutely, because he wanted to see this game everyone was talking about. But, I couldn't move for people who wanted to see the game, buy the game, whatever – that success on the ST allowed us to produce all of the other versions. We even produced a Spectrum version. If the machine existed we coded for it.

It received a staggering 10 releases across home computers available on the market at the time. It seemed a strange decision to force a quart into a pint pot, having to create a text-only version for the Spectrum or Atari XE for example, and not focus resources to create a 16-bit version that would reach a technical pinnacle.

[It's] because you have a contract that says you have to. We sold a lot of copies on those machines, and we wrote the engine that once you had written it for one machine it automatically worked on the others. It a restriction, absolutely, but we agreed the contract so we had to do it. There were versions that were a total waste of time, for the Amstrad computers [for example], but we had to do them.

We had different people working on different platforms, and that work fed back in to the main engine. [...] We had a good system in place of people doing work and then the work becoming part of the whole thing. Once we got to the last games, we pressed a button and the different versions popped out.



[The Pawn] The adventure that propelled Anita Sinclair and Magnetic Scrolls to the forefront of the British games industry in 1985. *The Pawn* was set in a time-honoured fantasy world, complete with an oddball cast of characters. It debuted Hugh Steers' sophisticated parser and Geoff Quilley's jaw-dropping images.



[Myth] Created for Tony Rainbird's Official Secretes club, this ultra rare, limited-edition adventure, told through the eyes of Poseidon, is a short-but-sweet [with sparse graphics] exploration of Ancient Greek mythology.



[Corruption] An underrated adventure that captured the corporate avarice and changing face of Britain in the 80s. It has a strong, atmospheric plot, and great packaging, including a cassette containing an answerphone message vital to completing the game.



[The Guild of Thieves] Following up from *The Pawn*, Magnetic Scrolls showed maturity in writing and technology with *The Guild*. They focused on delivering a solid, well-rounded adventure, with a strong plot that should appeal to the amateur and professional treasure pilferers in adventure land.



[Fish!] A game that polarised opinion, but whether you loved or hated the fishy puns, there was no arguing the quality of writing and game design in *Fish!* - an adventure lovingly crafted by John Molloy, Phil South and the Magnetic Scrolls shoal [sorry].



[Wonderland] Based upon Lewis Carroll's Alice books, *Wonderland* was sadly the last great masterpiece from Magnetic Scrolls. Peer through the looking glass and beyond its maligned windows system for an enchanting game that attempted to further the genre.



The 8-bit versions generally went under the radar for most. The sumptuous narrative and parser was retained, but they were text-only affairs for the majority of systems, or restricted to disk based releases for those machines that could support them. It was their 16-bit counterparts that stole the limelight, and for text adventures, we were moving into the era where graphics sold games.

[The] ST version flew out of the doors. The sales were ridiculous, because we were the first game to hit the ST with really good graphics. [Tony Rainbird] said it had to have graphics, and he introduced me to David [Pringle] who ran a computer company called Oxford Digital Enterprises that produced music programs. He had in his employ an artist he wasn't using called Geoff Quilley who lived in Cornwall, and David relinquished Geoff to me. [...] He did 90% of the graphics in *The Pawn*. If it hadn't been for Geoff who knows how successful we'd have been really, because the first thing people saw of the game was the graphics.

Her love for graphics wasn't always present. Anita infamously told Tony Rainbird two words when he insisted on turning their text opus into a graphic adventure: "Forget it". In response, Quilley created a forest scene, and drew the famous palace gardens illustration, winning over the obstinate Sinclair with the quality of his work.

Rob Steggles recalled the addition of graphics in his Rainbird Memoirs interview. "I went off to University and thought nothing more about it until I came back home at Christmas and Easter and found that Ken, Hugh and Anita had added a load of pictures drawn by Geoff Quilley which took the game onto the ST and onto a different level. Rather than just a dull text adventure we now had colour and pictures - these were what really caught the public's eye and made a big success of the game. The pictures were perfect for the setting and the timing couldn't have been better with the ST being launched."

The quality of the illustrations aren't lost on game historian Jimmy Maher either. He summed up the impact of *The Pawn*'s pictures perfectly. "*The Pawn* was the best looking text adventure yet released. When one of those magnificent images scrolled down onto the screen the average player's critical faculties scrolled off to oblivion to make space for it."

Rainbird threw their marketing nous and muscles behind the physical product, creating packaging that was worthy of the game. Their luxurious oversized blue boxes dominated retail shelves, and included a gameplay guide, poster and encoded clue book. There was also "A Tale of Kerovnia", a stage-setting novella written by Anita's sister Georgina.

We wanted to have stuff in the boxes, the extras, a reason why you buy them rather than rip off a copy from next door. We produced the stuff under budget guidance from Tony, but he agreed with us that we needed things in the box. These were games that were selling for £25, they weren't cheap. [Today] they do YouTube videos of unboxing experiences, but it felt very instinctual at that point. If someone has paid £25, that was a lot of money, you want them to go home with more than just a disk.

The accolades for the game flooded in, including the C&VG Golden Joystick Award for Best Adventure, and Adventure Game of the Year from Crash Magazine. The acclaim transcended the Channel and Atlantic, winning The Golden Tilt award from the leading French games magazine, and awards from the German magazines Happy Computer and 64'er.

It was the poster boy, the killer app, and delivered Infocom-beating technology – matching their sophisticated parser, but adding a larger game world and jaw-dropping graphics. It was a true British game changer.

Yes, but everything was a game changer. At that moment every single game that came out had something new and different that another game hadn't had. I don't really follow the games market that much, but when I do, they seem to be a better version of the game that came before. Whereas in those days, completely new ideas for games were coming out all of the time. It was amazing to watch. [...] I never really thought of a continental divide, I just think of the world. The Germans loved our games for instance. Even now there are German websites dedicated to Magnetic Scrolls. You wouldn't have thought an English text based adventure game would become a cult thing in Germany. We did think at one point of translation though we didn't do that – it would have been relatively easy for us to do different languages.

The game's reception in the press and at the CES shows didn't phase, nor surprise Anita. She was a rare commodity, a supremely articulate operator, who handled the demands of fronting the industry's hottest property with aplomb.

I've always had a very large head, so it wasn't much of a surprise, because I assumed we were going to be phenomenally successful. Anyone that knows me will just nod wisely with that statement. Everything I do in my life I assume is going to be tremendously successful. That's part of being an optimistic person.

[...] You have to remember Ken and Hugh were terribly young, and for them it was more difficult to pick up the phone and make calls. It was only because of my personality being the way it was we could make the phone calls – you know, [someone said] we've got to meet this character called Tony Rainbird – five minutes later I was on the phone to him. You can imagine that's a tricky thing, but I was full of confidence. In some sense Magnetic Scrolls came together because of me.

People like Ken who had a place at a University, and a very good University left to work with me at Magnetic Scrolls. That was a huge leap of faith. Hugh who went off to Bristol, worked every hour outside of University at Magnetic Scrolls. We had a great little team, and we've worked together ever since on and off. When you have a bonding experience like Magnetic Scrolls, at the end of it you're going to hate each other or always going to talk to each other.

Anita's business acumen and drive kept *The Pawn* in the news. Her influence over journalists meant magazine after magazine were queuing up to dedicate plenty of print runs to the game, and to the lady herself. Jimmy Maher commented "But graphics were just one of *The Pawn*'s not-so-secret weapons, the other being the potent comeliness of Ms. Anita Sinclair. The British press, who had the most

regular access to Anita and her charms, were the most smitten." It was the obvious move, but also a clever one, that Anita became the face of Magnetic Scrolls.

[...] I knew how business worked. I think if you'd met the three of us at that moment it would have been apparent to you who should be the front of the company. It wouldn't be true today. It was also quite sad, at one point I was getting all these interviews at the time, and I made the absolute decision to have Hugh give an interview. When the guy came down he spoke to Hugh for 55 minutes and me for about five minutes, but when he wrote the article he never mentioned Hugh's name. I felt bad about that, when they talked about Anita Sinclair's parser it really wasn't my parser. If they sat me down with the code I'd have no idea how it worked. I felt that Hugh and Ken should be sharing the limelight, but the journalists didn't see it that way, and I can understand that now. From a PR perspective Anita was a more interesting story than Hugh.

It's a difficult subject to broach. There's no doubting Anita's attraction, especially for magazine journalists used to interviewing a procession of stereotypical male programmers.

Exactly, whereas I was a bit more glamorous. I completely understand that, and it worked to my advantage. We got loads and loads and loads of press. We got so much press. And we wouldn't have got that press if it wasn't for me being female, and a little bit glamorous. I didn't set off thinking, oh, I'm female, I never played that side of myself up, quite deliberately. That wasn't in my mind, but in hindsight, looking back, of course they were interested in me because the alternative wasn't as interesting in a magazine. I was who I was, and was someone that was fascinated with computers and that shone through. Even now, god knows how many years later, the first thing I do when I get up is start programming. I'm still as obsessed today as I was then.

More was to come. Rainbird had entered into a multi-product contract with Magnetic Scrolls, and they were keen to maintain the momentum with more games. Tony Rainbird explained to Retro Gamer magazine, "The development costs for *The Pawn* were too high for a single product, and it was always going to be the case that the subsequent adventures using the same system would be cheaper to produce."

Their next title, *The Guild of Thieves* was well into production during *The Pawn*'s public relations campaign, and the team had started to expand to accommodate the development of multiple games. Anita had around 12 full-time staff, split between programming and art, with 4 freelance writers at her disposal.

Someone had to make them tea. We got to the stage where we could no longer do anything, there was no time left. I'd have much preferred if it would have stayed me, Hugh and Ken in a room, but you can't when a company grows.

Guild's plot and puzzles were astonishingly written in a single afternoon in the pub by Rob. He'd phoned Ken and Anita about doing another scenario, and argued to deviate from their original request for another fantasy game. They compromised on another story set in Kerovnia about a wannabe amateur burglar and his attempts to become a fully fledging member of the professional Guild.

Whereas *The Pawn* stretched surrealism and convoluted solutions, *Guild* was a more straight-forward old-school adventure with its emphasis on logical puzzles, treasure hunting and simpler character interaction.

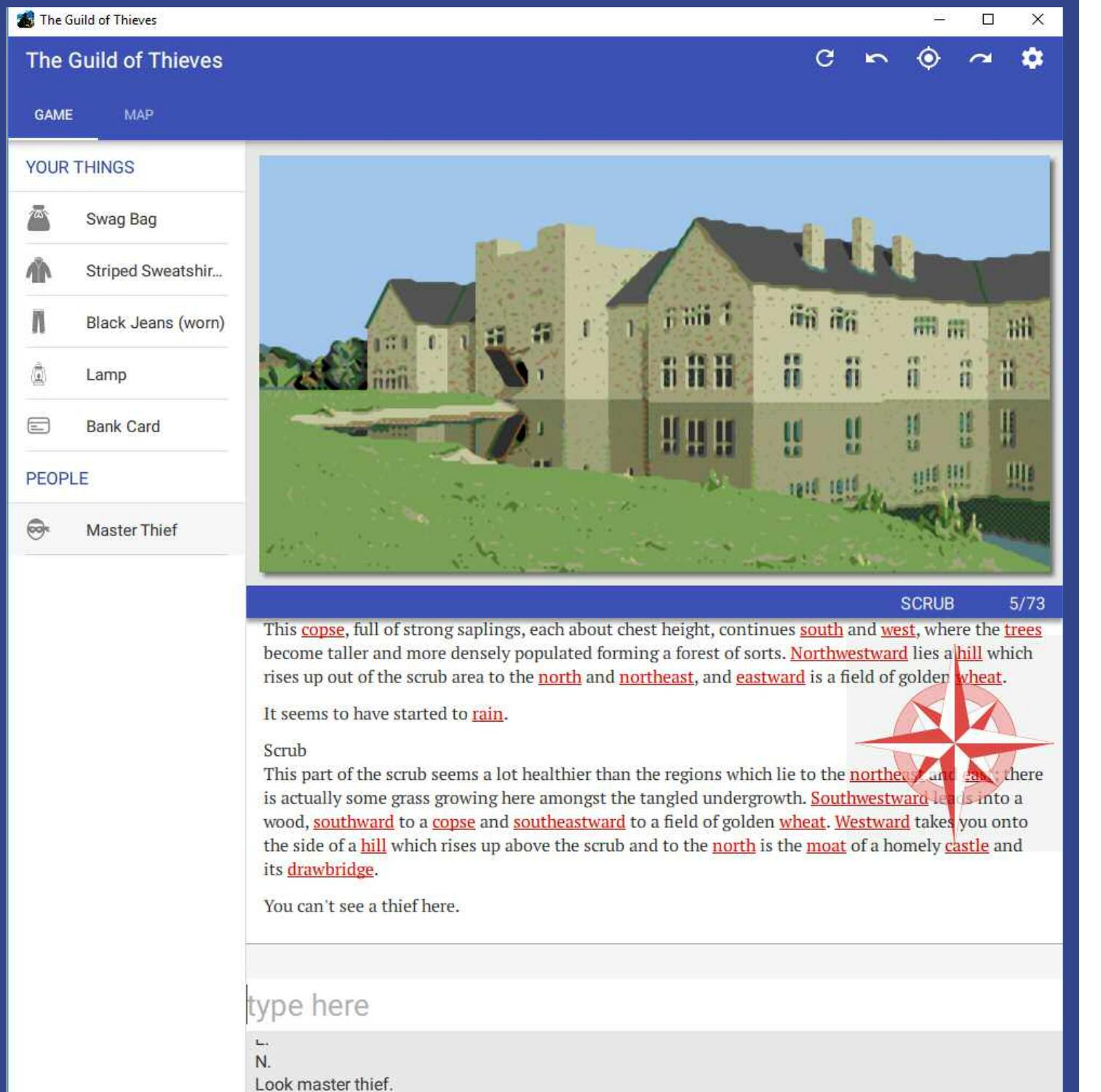
The Guild of Thieves which was the next one, that I think is the much better game. It's a more rounded game designed by Rob from scratch. [...] We added puzzles, I added a couple, everyone did. The game was much more rounded. I'm very fond of *The Pawn*, but as a game it doesn't necessarily play as well as *Guild* does.

Quilley was on hand again to produce the artwork, with Tristan Humphries aiding the conversion to other formats. The graphics were exquisite, in many cases excelling above the quality set by *The Pawn*. Keith Campbell in Commodore User was impressed: "[The

Magnetic Scrolls followed Infocom's lead and included a range of "feelies" in its packaging - items that enhanced the gameplay and atmosphere of a game by bridging the physical and digital world.



STRAND AND DELIVER



Strand Games, co-founded by Hugh Steers and Stefan Meier, with the backing of Anita and Ken, are currently working to preserve, restore and remaster Magnetic Scrolls cultural and digital artefacts. As well as working through the company's extensive VAX DAT drives, they are developing new versions of the games for release on modern desktop and mobile platforms. To date, *The Pawn* and *The Guild of Thieves* have received a make-over, with plans to eventually publish the entire back catalogue of masterpieces.

The company website maintains a fascinating blog that gives an insight into the processes undertaken to recover data from old technology, and how they are working towards evolving text adventures for a modern audience. There are a few nice Magnetic Scrolls surprises - an interview with Rob Steggles, hints that new adventures may be written and a great post on *Corruption* Easter Eggs.

<https://strandgames.com/>

graphics] make even those of *The Pawn* look crude in comparison. [...] Many pictures have infinitely more detail."

Jinxter was next - Scroll's answer to Infocom's *Enchanter*, with Anita's sister Georgina providing some of the back story and text for the included novella.

*She did. None of us could really write and Rob was off at University. We needed people that could write. My sister is a historian, and she could write. We used her, Michael Bywater and various people that could write. They didn't necessarily construct stories, but they could turn programmer ideas into the written word. She worked on an early version of *Jinxter* and the first draft of the novella that came with.*

Jinxter was well named. Its protracted development and a rumoured disagreement between Anita and Georgina led to much of the early plot being reworked. Georgina's drafts were polished and re-factored by Bywater, who with a limited amount of time before the game's expected release had to crowbar his changes into pre-existing data structures and puzzles.

As *Jinxter* was in the throes of final development, Rob Steggles got his wish to move away from fantasy worlds, and returned to write *Corruption*, a story of dodgy finances and underhand dealings in the City of London. He'd only contracted Anita and Ken for a job reference but was asked to come and work for them full-time in their new offices, located near London Bridge. "I thought it was now time to branch out into a different genre and I settled on the idea of a thriller set in the City of London [and] Ken and Anita liked the idea" he told L'avventura è l'avventura.

Corruption was a hugely underrated adventure, taking around nine months to complete. With its adult themes Anita hoped that it would appeal to a wider, and more mature audience. Jimmy Maher sums up the game, "Steggles captured the zeitgeist in a bottle. This being the height of Margaret Thatcher's remake and remodelled, hyper-capitalistic Britain." It was very well received when published, and it went on to win the prestigious Personal Computer World (PCW) Game of the Year award. Unfortunately, despite its recognition, sales were poor, and there was a state of diminishing returns for text adventure games. *Corruption* had a particularly low profile launch, and the industry had passed the peak in adventure sales. Some even speculated that *The Pawn* had been the peak of the market.

No, well, I don't really remember. I was having conversations with people about doing other sorts of games. I was talking to David Braben about doing a combination adventure, a 3D sort of adventure game, very much like a first-person adventure that you get now. Portal for example, that sort of game. David doing the 3D, us doing the game engine. Its a shame that they were in Cambridge. If they were in London we would have done a game together. 50 miles was a long way without the internet. [In the end] we could see the writing was on the wall, which it was.

Fish! was Magnetic Scrolls' final release with Rainbird, and fell victim to the disintegration of the publishing relationship between the two entities. BT had put Telecomsoft up for sale, and Tony Rainbird decided that his future was elsewhere, leaving in the run up to the announcement to pursue his own business interests.

His departure affected both Magnetic Scrolls and fellow adventure stable-mate Level 9. Tony it seemed was the games-guy at the company, someone that had a grounding in the industry, and a passion for games beyond a spreadsheet and a product list. It was a common occurrence in the fast-changing industry in the mid to late 80s, as the move away from the hobbyist morphed into the "shifting boxes" corporate mentality of the onrushing 90s. Level 9's contract was terminated by mutual agreement, but Anita attempted to sit out the storm.

[Tony leaving was] A huge blow to us, really. He came to work with us for a while, but then went and started a new company. He was a fantastic publisher for us, but he couldn't work inside the [Telecomsoft] system and we couldn't either. He really understood the market, and he was a really good publisher. It was a shame when

he left.

Eventually Microprose purchased Telecomsoft, and the Silverbird, Firebird and Rainbird labels - including the rights to Magnetic Scrolls games. It created one of the biggest UK based software companies, and should have heralded a new era of investment and promotion for Anita, Ken, Hugh and the team. After the mismanagement of the Scrolls games in the run up to the acquisition there was understandable trepidation from Sinclair who argued Microprose may not have the legal rights to their games. "Microprose are a very competent organisation" Anita told ACE Magazine in the autumn of 1989, "we are ready to discuss the situation at any time. [...] For the last four months we've been in complete turmoil and have suffered serious losses as a result. Our products were not properly distributed, during this time and *Fish!* in particular was badly affected."

The unease continued, and Scrolls disappeared from the press radar as Ken and team retired ELTHAM and worked on a brand new adventure engine. Anita and Microprose were awkward bedfellows. The unhappy marriage came to an end in January 1990 when Anita signed a deal with Nick Alexander of Virgin Mastertronic.

Everything has its time. We could have shifted gear and done something radically different but we decided not to. That was probably a mistake.

But the new technology from Hugh and Ken was radical. Magnetic Scrolls unveiled *Wonderland* in July, with a story by freelancer David Bishop and a brand new cross-platform, graphical multi-window interface called *Magnetic Windows*. *Magnetic Windows* offered a iconographic representation of available compass movements, objects that could be interacted with, the player's inventory, as well as a story window that operated as a traditional text adventure parser. Its innovative features were powerful - a map that drew itself as you explored, and added animation support for graphics. Each window could be resized, open, closed, and moved around on screen.

It was a huge undertaking for such a small company with limited resources, and was a root and branch attempt at to change the way that people played text adventure games. It promoted the same complexity, with the usability of a GUI. It was the direct opposite approach of a new style of interface that had started to edge traditional adventure games from the market. The point and click revolution under LucasArts had begun, and players it seemed, wanted simpler interfaces, less text, and an easier way to interact with adventures.

Yes, and that continues to be the case. Games have got simpler, well, except for the really big games. We almost certainly made the wrong call with that, but our publishers wanted to do it, and David Bishop was on the ball and the game looked really good, with animations, and was easier to play from a point-and-click perspective but without sacrificing any of the text adventure game play. It was the wrong call, but a shame.

Wonderland was the last adventure from Magnetic Scrolls, its costly development and insufficient sales virtually bankrupt the company. Despite the argument that *Magnetic Windows* was attempting to reinvent the wheel, the adventure itself, loosely based on Alice in Wonderland was very well reviewed in the press. Keith Campbell, a stalwart Magnetic Scrolls [and Anita] fan, proclaimed that the game "had all the fine detail that has become the hallmark of Magnetic Scrolls", and that it was "nigh on unbeatable at the moment, I cannot see it being bettered for at least a couple of years."

Anita hoped that the system would open the genre to people who normally wouldn't play adventures, so they used *Magnetic Windows* to revamp their back catalogue of games for *The Magnetic Scrolls Collection* released by Virgin in 1991. Unfortunately, the tide had turned, and Virgin dropped them due to poor sales. They attempted to keep afloat by producing an RPG - a haphazard and half-hearted affair called *The Legacy: Realm of Terror*, for all people, Microprose, their previous nemesis. It was the end of an era and the demise of one of Britain's greatest software houses. But Scrolls weren't alone. Level 9 and Infocom had both folded, and Legend Entertainment setup by former Infocom staff had attempted their own [if somewhat

Graphics



File Text Verbs Commands

basic] reimagining of a GUI based system for adventures with Timequest and Gateway. By 1993 they'd deserted text adventures too.

Also remember that people were changing their computers, so things were evolving so fast that we couldn't keep up. We might have if we had raised a pile of money and gone in a different way, but that wasn't what Magnetic Scrolls was about, it just wasn't us. It was the beauty of having your own business, the mistakes were yours to make.

So we are left wondering what could have been, especially for games that would never be released - the looking-glass follow-up to Wonderland, and a game that magazines wrongly reported as being Corruption's working title - Upon Westminster Bridge.

It was my game. I just didn't have the time to finish it. I was running around doing everything else. Every time I sat down to write it there was another crisis to solve. Programming is a very solitary activity. To program you need to have nothing else on your mind, and at that time I was just running around fighting fires and I couldn't write. It's a real shame, because it was going to be an Anita game, which was different to other games. I don't really remember much about it to be honest. In those days I never made notes. It had a murder mystery element, and had a mechanism of playing by many people's perspectives simultaneously, so was quite interesting. [...] I wrote this code around non-playing characters that was super intelligent and in fact an entire language to program them in. I can remember pieces of the coding, but not the story. As I say, I just had no time to do it.

The Magnetic Scrolls IP now resides with Strand Games, setup by Hugh Steers and Stefan Meier, and supported by the original members of the team, including Anita, Ken Gordon, Rob Steggles and Servan Keondjian.

Hugh is currently re-releasing the games [and] I'm terribly pleased about. It is nice that the games are still there and people still remember them. They were a little slice of life, and a good slice of life. [The new games] are amazing. It's better to play the original, but given 99.99% percent can't do that, given the fact you can now get one from the Appstore and play it is excellent. If Hugh can find a way of creating the world of text adventure beyond just releasing our games, he could open up a world that people could really enjoy playing. I played a pre-release version of *The Pawn*, and even though

I know that game inside out I was shocked at how long it took to play it. Hugh has ideas about a way of playing text adventures on mobile, and I hope he can realise it, and it'll be good if he can. If we can get the mobile generation interested in text adventures they'll appreciate it, because most apps are pretty mindless, and it would be nice to have something to get your teeth into.

I think Hugh told me that Rob Steggles is around and they might write a game together again which will be fantastic. I think that's amazing. Hugh will do a great job. I wonder whether Hugh, Ken and I should lock ourselves in room and come up with something new



VICKY CARNE

Inspired by *The Hobbit*, Vicky Carne combined her publishing expertise with her love of adventure games and formed Mosaic Publishing. She coined the term "bookware", creating a brand new category of adventure publishing.

Vicky Carne worked in sales and marketing for Sinclair-Browne, a small book publisher part owned by Clive Sinclair. With the launch of the ZX Spectrum, Carne felt that her company was "ideally placed" to take advantage of such a prestigious and well-connected co-owner and author a range of books specifically aimed at home microcomputers.

Carne steadily built strong relationships with the many main players in the games industry. She began to play games, starting with Melbourne House's classic, *The Hobbit*, one of the first games to be based on a novel, and shipped with a copy of the book. *The Hobbit*'s success gave her the impetus and innovative idea to start her own publishing house that focused on transferring the written page to the screen.

[Vicky] I was a fan of the idea of text adventures and how we could adapt stories. I'd played some of the 'choose your own adventure' book stories in the past. I played *The Hobbit* and enjoyed the superb *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* game. That was where I first got the idea for what became Mosaic Publishing. As a Sci-Fi fan, my first and still probably best, idea was to turn Isaac Asimov's Foundation trilogy into a computer game. Sadly, we couldn't get the rights for that one. But the idea was born.

The main challenge, as per many start-ups was finance, especially given Vicky's lack of business experience in such a fledgling industry. Many others were attempting to find their feet and struggled to understand exactly how the industry would shape itself. Carne knew that she needed to find a niche for her company, and a unique angle in which to bring games to market. Her growing contact list became useful.

I knew some people in sales in the UK office of the publisher, John Wiley & Sons. A chat at a book fair led to them deciding that my new company could provide the perfect vehicle for testing the market. They offered to guarantee the purchase of [a few] thousands of each of my first games thus making the funding needed to launch significantly less than would otherwise have been required. And, of course, giving potential investors the comfort of knowing that a company with the prestige of Wiley was backing my venture.

Mosaic's first three games released in 1984 were *In the Beginning* [an arcade game on the C64 written by Humphrey Walwyn], *The*

Unorthodox Engineers: The Pen and The Dark and The Width of the World. *The Pen and The Dark*, their first adventure based upon the science fiction short stories written by Colin Kapp, was coded by the much-missed C&VG Adventure columnist Keith Campbell.

I can't remember how we met Keith. Possibly at a computer games fair or via the literary agent Richard Goilner - he was Tim Hartnell's agent and had introduced me to him back in the Sinclair Browne days. Keith was a delightful man. I'm sure he won't mind me saying that [not many people] had heard of him when we first got in touch about The Unorthodox Engineers.

Pen and *Width* were based on relatively unknown source material at the time. Given Carne's extensive literacy agency contacts, the availability of books from the current best-selling lists, and the option to delve into the back-catalogue of classic literature it seemed an odd decision to publish these specific texts over something better known.

Campbell, in a 2005 interview with Jacob Gunness hinted that the choice of game went beyond selecting the best known book: "Among the titles that Vicky had options on was a book of short science fiction stories called *The Unorthodox Engineers* by Colin Kapp. [...] I agreed to look through the stories, which I enjoyed, and decided that probably *The Pen* and *The Dark* lent itself best to writing a game around."

Micro Adventurer magazine featured the fledgling Mosaic Publishing, and reported on a raft of proposed titles for adaption – the Stainless Steel Rat series [later released on C64], Special Deliverance, and *The World Thinker* all received consideration. The difficulty in selecting a book that would make a good adventure game went hand-in-hand with the difficulty in obtaining and understanding book licencing at the time.

We couldn't do everything. Most likely a mix of what we felt would work, what we could get a licence for, on our terms, and who was available to write it. We were among the first. *The Hobbit* had set some sort of precedent. But we did have to work out what aspect of a licence we were acquiring under an overall 'electronic rights' contract. In practice, apart from not getting Foundation there was mainly interest among publishers and agents in working with us. After all, it gave them an entry into a whole new world.



Campbell, without any input from the author, coded the game using his TRS-80, and then translated it to the flavour of BASIC on each home computer that Carne had asked to be supported. Mosaic published versions for the BBC, Spectrum and C64. A complete version for the Dragon 32 was never released, and Campbell had to rework the Commodore game after it had been badly programmed by a University Student. Keith told Guinness, "Vicky sent me the tape and asked me to test it out. It did not work in a big way - it was absolutely unplayable! I started off trying to debug it, but the unknown student had made such a mess, that I decided it would far easier to start again from scratch. In the end it was the best version."

As with *The Hobbit*, both games were bundled with the books [or extracts] they were based upon, and Carne coined the phrase "Bookware", creating a whole new category of game publishing. She told Paul Drury of Retro Gamer Magazine "We had hard and soft ware, so I thought bookware was a good description of what we were doing." It was a logical step. Melbourne House through their licencing agreement had been obliged to include a copy of Tolkien's novel, but for Carne it was a good compromise and a chance to bridge the markets.

It was only really going to appeal to someone who liked games - or they'd just buy the book. It seemed logical to include the story.

It was a model that began to attract the attempt of more traditional book publishing companies, seeing it as a valid way of breaking into the games industry. Puffin, Penguin and Hodder & Stoughton in Britain all muscled in on Mosaic's territory. Book lovers were treated to home computer versions of James Herbert's *The Rats* [Five Ways Software, 1985], Joe Dever and Gary Chalk's *Lone Wolf* series [Five Ways Software, 1984], Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson's *Warlock of Firetop Mountain* [Crystal Computing, 1984], Jeffrey Archer's *Not a Penny More, Not a Penny Less* [Domark, 1987], JM Barrie's *Peter Pan* [Soft Option, 1984] and many others.

Sales were encouraging, buoyed by Mosaic putting *Pen and The Dark* into WH Smith's Book Club; a monthly mail-order bookseller where exposure in their special selection feature [which by default was mailed to members if no other choice was made] guaranteed a good level of business.

When Book Club Associates [BCA] set up their computer game lists, they captured a very large market – indeed [they] were probably responsible for increasing the market. Some other game publishers at the time who had come through Webster's [the prime distributor of computer games in Britain before Centresoft] knew of this route to market games. [...] Given sales in the UK of even a best-seller were likely to be only a few thousand in the early days, having a game featured by BCA was an enormous boost. I'm afraid I can't remember any actual numbers, but it made many thousands of pounds difference.

For Mosaic's next series of licenced games, Vicky turned to another contact she'd made during her journey working her way into the industry. She employed the services of respected British adventure developer Level 9, having being introduced to Mike and Pete Austin via her PR agent Joe Lang. He'd met the brothers whilst working with Lynx computers, a niche machine that Level 9 supported with some of their earlier games.

The first title that they attempted together was *The Saga of Erik The Viking*, taken from the book by former Monty Python Terry Jones. Jones' tale told of Erik, a Viking warrior who with the crew of his ship, the Golden Dragon, set sail to find "the land where the sun goes at night". With illumination from Michael Foreman's wonderful illustrations, Jones proved adept at turning his hand from surreal adult comedy to children's literature, winning the Children's Book Award in the process.

It was fertile source material for the Austin's creative imagination,

BEYOND THE SCREEN

Unable to completely desert her publishing roots, Carne partnered with John Wily and Sons in 1984 and released a physical book from author Nicholas Palmer.

Entitled *Beyond the Arcade: Adventures and War Games on your Computer*, its text adventure content was rather thin and US-oriented, focusing more on wargames and play-by-mail games.



3) hire a new gardener.
I hire a new gardener.

Something is wrong with the restaurant!
Nobody is eating our Nouvelle English
Cuisine. Peggy says that Pigeon breasts
with gooseberry sauce remind her of the
last days of the Roman Empire.
Pick one of:
1) abandon Nouvelle English Cuisine;
2) advertise the restaurant;
3) tell Caroline.

[The Archers] Pete Austin was a fan of the long-running BBC Radio 4 soap opera, set in the fictional English village of Ambridge. Given the very middle-class appeal of the show, the game set you as the producer, instead of a main character, having to make decisions in order to deliver the best drama possible, and please your boss – the controller of Radio 4. Written by Level 9, the producer of the show, William Smethurst and its scriptwriters, *The Archers* is a solid Level 9 adventure, with professional writing and a high standard of graphics.

?extra ignored
Such an object is either not here or has
been described in an unorthodox way!

? read letter
SORRY I CAN'T BE HERE TO BRIEF YOU FRITZ
WE'RE RELYING ON YOU TO SOLVE THIS
MYSTERY ONCE AND FOR ALL. - Max

? open voucher
That is not possible right now

? look voucher

* AVANT SKI *
To the retailer:
This voucher will be redeemed
by the Makers of Frosty-bytes

?



[The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole] Guide the erstwhile Adrian through a particularly difficult year of his teenage life, dealing with spots, problematic parents, and the love of his life, Pandora, in this terrific adaptation of Sue Townsend's blockbuster novels.

and in the best Level 9 tradition featured 200 locations, living up to their tried and tested game metric. With Erik, Mike and Pete didn't recreate the book's narrative, but used the characters to mould a second saga broadening the children's favourite. "It's a real extension of the book, not a retelling of the story" Terry Jones told Home Computer Weekly, "playing the game, even I don't know what's going to happen next."

Despite being a title from such a well-known author and successful source, the cost of licencing of the popular IP wasn't cost prohibitive for Carne.

No – that is, we were very small, the market was very small, so we didn't offer much by way of an advance v royalties. Until a mass market grew up for selling games, the sums weren't going to be large!

A 20 page booklet containing excerpts from the book was bundled with the game. It was used as a hint and clue book, rather than to prove a verbatim account of the novel. "To find out more about Erik, his friends and his enemies, read the extracts" teased the instructions, "you may find a few clues in these pages that will help you solve the game". Erik was a game that brought with it an unexpected audience, as many saw its content as delivering an important educational by-product. Micro Adventurer magazine was one of the first to hint at this benefit. "Erik is one of the few adventure games that not only entertains, but educates as well, as it is very likely to stimulate further interest in the Vikings."

[The educational angle was] almost by accident, yes. [...] Erik the Viking was taken up by many schools for some of the earliest computer based learning.

Vicky commented further to Retro Gamer, that "[it was] reviewed in educational magazines, discussing the exciting ways it was being used in geography, history and computer teaching."

Despite its more simplistic text [The Austin's envisaged younger players from aged 8 upwards] the game was well received, with Micro Adventurer saying it's graphics were "arguably the most impressive and authentic scenes to have appeared on a Spectrum adventure". Richard Price of Sinclair User went a little further, "Level 9 games are well above the normal standard of most adventures" he reassured, "and this one is no exception, a blend of heroic adventure and detective story".

It attained the runner-up nomination for Best Adventure Game of 1984 in C&VG magazine's prestigious Golden Joystick Awards, and having the celebrated Python star on hand to do PR tours was a boon for the publisher – and game sales – just two weeks after launch it entered the majority of top ten game charts. Thanks to the programming expertise provided by Level 9, and the portability of their A-Code engine, Erik received the widest distribution of a Mosaic release to-date.

Along with *Width of the World*, they added two Commodore 64 only titles to the catalogue, both developed by Shards Software: *The Stainless Steel Rat Saves The World*, based on the novel by Harry Harrison, and *The Nomad of Time*, adapted from Michael Moorcock's famous Oswald Bastable stories. Both shipped in oversized boxes with copies of the novel, or extracts inside the packaging.

Carne had now joined a growing elite of women blazing a trail in the 80s British gaming industry. It was fitting for her next title she was contacted by one of the most innovative and popular adventure game creators, headed by the mysterious "Game Mistresses" of St. Brides. The ladies penned *The Snow Queen*, a Quill'ed adventure based upon the symbolic fairy tale by Hans Christian Anderson. It was a light-hearted game, though the story seemed a little darker,

following a girl seeking to save her brother after he was corrupted looking into a broken fragment of a looking glass that had been corrupted by the devil.

All I can tell you is that they got in touch from, I think, Ireland and sent us a game to look at and we agree to publish it. I never met them as far as I can remember.

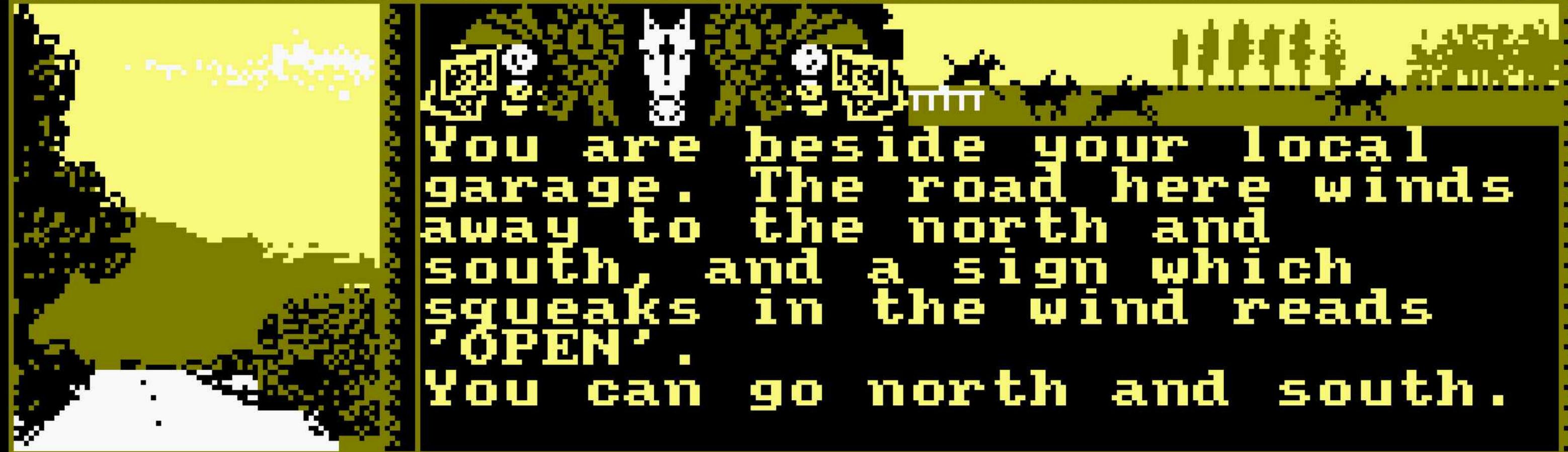
It more straight-forward adventure, and keeping in line with the source was aimed more at younger players. It also featured a female protagonist, Gerda that on occasion had a mind of her own. Marianne explained its appeal to Sinclair User. "Perhaps girls are embarrassed about playing zappy games" she argued. Mosaic once again included an abridged version of the story in the packaging, and made good reference to it for hints and clues – a neat and subversive way of encouraging kids to read. They had planned to make it a series of tie-ins with St Brides at the helm, but Raffles and Alice – the two follow-ups to *The Snow Queen* never materialised.

After Erik and *The Snow Queen* gained fans with young adult and family audiences, Mosaics next title would take their sales to another level. Sue Townsend's Adrian Mole books were the publishing sensation of the 1980s, the Harry Potter of the time having estimated sales of over 20 million copies worldwide and translations into 30 languages. The Mole diaries followed the daily dramas and misadventures of Adrian, struggling through adolescence in Britain under the governance of Margaret Thatcher.

With the game under the conductor's baton of Peter Austin, the adaptation of Mole was a change in direction for both Level 9 and Mosaic. Out went the traditional adventure typed verb/noun parser, and in came multiple-choice options, where the player steered the story along a set of pre-defined paths and outcomes.

[Mike Austin] The vision was to have interactive novels, and to aim to appeal to a wider market than the puzzle-oriented audience for adventure games. I think Mole actually appealed mainly to older people than our traditional audience.

The Austins modified their A-Code engine to support the simplification of input, and Carne worked closely alongside Level 9 as the development of the game progressed, and commented that her experience as a publisher was taken into consideration. Carne told Paul Drury, "the multi-choice format made it much more accessible for lots of people, [...] people who wouldn't sit down and play an adventure game." It received a lukewarm reception from the reviews [the majority 'hilariously' parodying the Mole diary entries] with its text attracting specific criticism. Press and gamers were disappointed with Level 9 for their lack of creativity in the game, and



[Above] An idyllic spot to refuel in the Ram Jam Corporation's adaptation of Dick Francis' *Twice Shy*.

highlighted that much of the text had been taken verbatim from the books. "Admittedly, the text is amusing in some places" said ZX Computing, "but if all you want to read is the diaries [then] buying both books would still cost less than this program". Regardless, it seemed most players disregarded their advice, and *Mole* sold well over 300,000 copies, boosted by a bundle deal with Commodore that included a copy with every new C64 machine. It was the best-selling game for both Mosaic and Level 9.

We got far more sales through retail than previously, probably in part because of the brand and in part because there were more potential purchasers - i.e., more people had computers on which to play these games.

The next game came when Mosaic obtained the rights to BBC Radio series *The Archers*. According to Carne, the licence was her own idea. She enjoyed the show and thought it would appeal to a wider audience. It was a strange opinion and licence, given that the average age of the Radio 4 listener was estimated to be 56 years - the resultant game may not have appeared a comfortable bedfellow of the usual teenage game buying market.

Bear in mind, there wasn't much of a 'games buying market' then. [...] We were broadening the appeal, getting reviews and

features outside the games magazines and I knew it would go well through BCA.

To lessen the rather middle-class content of the radio scripts, the game was given a broader brushstroke focusing on the player being the story editor, where decisions affected the outcomes of the plot. It was co-written between Carne, Level 9 and the BBC's original scriptwriting team.

We worked with William Smethurst, the producer of *The Archers* at the time. I think he wrote some of the script.

Carne felt that the structure of the show, with its many linear storyline threads suited the multiple-choice engine developed for *Erik and Mole*. It's witty and sharp script made it one of the best releases from Mosaic and Level 9, and despite the good sales (being a Book Club Associates selection again) has become one of their rarer and more sought-after titles.

Even more left-field was Mosaic's final game, an adaption of the BBC TV series "Yes, Prime Minister" starring Nigel Hawthorne and Paul Eddington. You played the Rt. Hon. James Hacker, MP and Prime Minister attempting to steer the "leaky ship of state through a turbulent week in Westminster". Mosaic employed the services of Oxford Digital Enterprises to create the game, even though several games journalists had speculated that work had started on the political game some months earlier. Some reported that a first game, *Yes, Minister* [a previous series where Hacker worked in the fictional Department of Administrative Affairs] was in development by either Level 9 or The Ram Jam Corporation.

It didn't happen. They didn't [do any work].

When the game was released, it coincided with the launch of the new TV series and *Yes PM* was packaged in a wonderful reproduction of the famous Despatch Boxes or 'Red Boxes' of the British Government, designed to carry sensitive documents of state. It added a touch of class to an otherwise relatively humdrum game, and was designed by the late Richard Kelly.

Richard created the logo for the company and a whole font called Nibble for it. [...] It wasn't particularly extravagant. Simply another plastic box with a well-designed cover insert as we always tried to do.

There was a switch in style again, combining the multiple-choice pathways of *Mole*, but with an interactive icon-driven environment that allowed Hacker to manipulate the various functions of his office. There was some humorous writing, but the game was let down by limited re-playability and a rather tedious multi-load system on cassette versions.

The script was written by someone [that Oxford Digital Enterprises] knew and we got feedback at various stages from Antony Jay, one of the writers of the TV series.

Ram Jam Corporation, famous for their adventure games *Valkyrie 17* and *The Terrors of Trantoss* teamed up with Mosaic for more bookware. They produced *Twice Shy*, taken from the horse racing thriller by Dick Francis. It was released on the Spectrum and Amstrad [a half-hearted and lazy port without

colour] and announced for the Commodore 64 in January 1987. Unfortunately it seemed that time was up for the 8-bit text adventure market, and Ram Jam ceased trading roughly 6 months after the Spectrum version hit the market, without the Commodore version materialising. Their other promoted collaboration with Mosaic, *The Story of the Amulet*, disappeared without trace too.

Text adventures were in turmoil with the advent of the new 16-bit machines, and commercial developers began to desert the genre. The end came for Mosaic in 1988 when Vicky wanted to move on to another stage in her life.

I went on to do other things. Nothing more interesting than that!

Thus the book was closed on Mosaic, and Carne returned back into a more traditional literacy business. The existing licences were moved on, mostly to Virgin Mastertronic who published a follow-up to the original *Mole* game called *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*.

As a retrospective, Vicky Carne was a welcome trailblazer in the British games industry. The influence of Mosaic was obvious. Many saw *The Hobbit*'s inclusion of the book as a gimmick, but her company changed that perspective, bringing an educational and added value to the thought behind products that reached the shelves.

8TH DAY

After escaping *Velnor's Lair* unscathed, **Michael White** founded 8th Day Software with Gary Kelbrick. They weaved adventuring dreams, courted royal controversy, and forged a reputation for low price, high quality titles.

Michael White was born in Wallasey, a town in the north-eastern corner of the Wirral Peninsula, in sight of Liverpool that lay across the River Mersey. It gave him a heritage that was "a curious mix of non-scouse and nearly Welsh". His first exposure to computers was leafing through the paper pages of early computer magazines, before an unfortunate (or fortunate) car accident claim left him a small amount of money to buy himself a ZX Spectrum.

He began scouring the backs of magazines for small ad's and purchased many of the home written games that began to appear for a few pounds. He clearly remembers the influence and professionalism that Level 9 brought to the genre, fondly recalling the included hints and tips envelope that you could send back to the publisher.

You would get back a hand-written note encouraging you (in a cryptic style) to continue with the game from where you were stuck. Happy Days!

He spent his days working as a store manager for the Co-op, a job he found to be "terribly soul-sapping". Finding solace in adventures, he was engrossed by Derek Brewster's *Velnor's Lair*, a Dungeons and Dragons inspired adventure that cast the player as a Wizard, Warrior or Priest. He loved it, and became obsessed, playing it until he finally was able to defeat the Black Wizard.

Velnor had peaked his interest, and the genre captivated him in such a way that he wanted to create his own, and saw it as a release from the boredom of his job. He got together with school friend Gary Kelbrick, to form a homebrew label called 8th Day.

Gary and I were partners in the company from the start. He was good with drawing, I was hopeless. I always saw Eighth Day as a creative

outlet – I love to tell stories – but with Gary it was more of a business.

Their first game, *Dark Lore* was released in 1983. It was a simple affair, much in the guise of *Adventure* - as most inaugural attempts were. It was slow in response and lacked a comprehensive vocabulary, but was a solid effort.

I can remember very little about it to be honest, other than it was written in Spectrum BASIC and was so big it would sometimes run out of memory!

They advertised in the small ads of Home Computer Weekly, Personal Computer Weekly and Micro Adventurer proclaiming *Dark Lore* as "a dynamic new text adventure". Alongside new releases such as *The Hobbit* it was a bold claim and predictably, the press didn't quite see it that way. Home Computing Magazine criticised its lack of response time and frustrating parser. Still, it was an achievement for a homegrown piece of software to appear in a mainstream magazine review, and gave them both encouragement to continue writing games.

The release of Gilsoft's *The Quill* helped remove some of the programming problems that beset *Dark Lore*, and accelerated their writing process during the coming months. Michael and Gary found their combined imaginations were able to craft a multitude of adventures, and before long they'd started to build a catalogue of half a dozen or so game designs. Instead of releasing each game piecemeal onto the market, they bundled them together under a brand called *Games Without Frontiers* - cleverly promoting each title for a specific target audience and player ability. To gain more press coverage, and to uniquely position themselves in the market, 8th Day retailed the games an astonishingly measly £1.75, with each package having a separate program on the cassette that helped beginners get

YOU ARE OUTSIDE A POKEY WIZARDS CAVE. MIST OBSCURES YOUR VIEW BUT YOU CAN JUST MAKE OUT A LARGE CAULDRON INSIDE. AN BEARDED WIZARD IS HERE, EYEING YOU WITH DISDAIN.

THE WIZARD SMILES GRATEFULLY AND HOLDS OUT A GOLDEN TALISMAN. <THIS IS THE SACRED AMULET OF YURACH, THE ONLY DEFENCE AGAINST THE DARK-LORD. BUT BEWARE! DARK TIMES ARE UPON US...>

WHAT NEXT? TAKE AMULET

[Dark Lore] It may be written in Spectrum BASIC, with a starved vocabulary and wheezing response time, but Dark Lore is a fun, with some humourous text (where verbosity allows).

You sit balanced high up in the oak tree. Next to you a poor little battered teddy bear hangs from a branch, with only one arm he looks forlorn. "Please help me," he cries. "Take me to the Land of Make-believe and find me a new arm." Tearfully you agree to help him. He tells you that in return he will help you find your mum!!

Give me your command.

[Cuddles] Written by Gary Kelbrick, Cuddles is a touchingly original tale of a baby's desire to escape the confines of their playpen and find a teddy's missing arm. Once free, baby wanders through a world of fairy tales, nursery rhymes and children's books - all before bedtime.

You are south of a large gate You can also see:- A Dusty robed man dozing over an old ledger in the middle of the field! "Uhm", he mutters, "now look here - you've wrecked my best Aspen Wand getting here - if you see it around I'd be most glad for it's return!"

I'm ready for your instructions.

OPEN GATE

[Faerie] A surreal fantasy adventure written using *The Quill*. Faerie is a good old fashioned treasure hunt, and 8th Day's most popular title from the Games Without Frontiers range.

to grips with playing the games.

Before this all computer games were £6 - £7. As a commercial decision we made a range, a brand if you like. So it was important that they were all different difficulties, different subjects, but all the same price. That was the most important part. It had never been done before at that price point, so in some ways we were pioneers. The adventure guide on the back of the tape therefore was part of the branding, whilst at the same time helping people who were new to adventure games. It was an attempt to broaden the market too as Gary was convinced the market was finite, whilst I was not so sure.

Over a period of two months the *The Games Without Frontiers* series was released in two batches of three games. They included *Ice Station Zero*, *Cuddles*, *Four Minutes To Midnight*, *In Search of Angels*, *Faerie* and *Quann Tulla*. With copies in hand they visited all of the magazine publishers, seeing it as an important duty to build relationships and talk to them face-to-face. It seemed to pay off. The set of games were all well received, proving what Michael had hoped for - that a budget price didn't mean poor quality. They drew the attention of Smart Egg Software, another fellow adventure developer, who approached 8th Day with a deal.

This is where the business trail gets a little murky - I rather stupidly signed a contract with Smart Egg software that gave game rights away, for what I thought was for a limited time and for, dear God, a royalty only basis. Needless to say, I never saw a penny, and realised eventually, that the games weren't mine anymore.

Without control of the titles, Michael was powerless to intervene when the rights for *Quann Tulla* were passed onto Clem Chamber's CRL Group. They worked in conjunction with Smart Egg and released a re-vamped version of the game with enhanced text, a polished look and the addition of graphics. The new version was called *Federation* and was released in 1988. CRL was one of the small number of mainstream publishers that continued to commission and develop adventures at full price during the mid-80s. It was an advantage for publishers such as 8th Day and Zenobi to feed high quality games into the lower priced gap in the market.

There were still a few good adventure game writers out there, but they were never any of them as good far as I was concerned. I think it's only natural that the arcade game style companies were more reliant on moving images. To release a text-based game would (to them at least) seem to be a retrograde step. Image was absolutely everything in those days. Still is, presumably!

But "image" was something that was creeping into the adventure market. Several titles had pioneered the use of location graphics, however primitive, and reviewers started to award games scores based upon the quality of the imagery used. Michael, having adopted *The Quill*, quickly got to grips with their graphics add-on, *The Illustrator* and began to introduce artwork into the 8th Day range of games. Over the duration of the company he turned to several artists, as well as Gary, including Martin Rennie, Shaun McClure and Tony Teadwell. Once he had completed the text for the game, he would bundle up *The Quill*'s database and dispatch it for the art to be added.

[It was all] market driven, yes. Let's be honest - the graphics were awful and brought nothing to the game at all. The thing was that Gilsoft had made the drawing aspect so small graphics did not take up much room - it was masterful programming from Gilsoft when all is said and done.

That impediment to graphics was an indication of the approach Michael took to writing adventures. Graphics were a distraction, and viewed as a necessary evil. He sought to inject as much humour as he could into his games, over the usual three or so months that it took writing one. Some titles could take as long as nine months to develop, again a symptom of having to undertake the entire duties of a publishing house - the design, production, and duplication of the paper and cassettes. It was often a process that took longer than writing the games themselves.

Between 1987 and 1988 several more games came along. From the fantasy and science-fiction genres, Michael moved into comedy and



You are in Rocksoffs nightclub. Prince Andrew sits surrounded by dejected career-conscious models and empty Champagne bottles. He cries aloud into an empty glass. "What have I done?" he wails...

What Next?

[HRH] White takes a pot-shot at the Royal Family in this Spitting Image-esque send up of life in the monarchy. Your quest? To return a mistakenly delivered (substantial) giro cheque back to its rightful owner at Buck House. With smatterings of graphics, it's a fun, if controversial title, that has you quaffing champagne with princes.



Fri 6:14pm

Holmes is in the Professor's work room. Wooden shelves support bottles of all sizes. A doorway leads west. Holmes can see the Professor's diary.

TAKE DIARY

[The Raven] In *The Raven*, you play Sherlock Holmes, and must solve a complex murder case in a small village. It benefits from all of the PAWS advantages, though the real-time clock occasionally stunts progress if you're not in the right place at the right time.

SCORE: 4 / 250 Turns: + 968

that howled about the room seemed to bring the night in closer.
• UNLOCK CABINET
This was done.
• OPEN CABINET
Could you be more specific?
• GET BOOK
The large, leather-bound book was picked up.
• READ BOOK
The book seemed to shift in her hands as she began to read... slowly the words began to take a form, a shape.. The page seemed to pull her into the tale, entwining her with the words that formed there, dragging her in...

More...

[The Weaver Of Her Dreams] 8th Day's swansong, and one of their best. Weaver has a female protagonist transported into a fantasy dream world by a magic book. It's an adventure of intricate puzzles, spells, dragons, talking doors and necromancers.

parody for HRH and Ronnie Goes To Hollywood. HRH caused a stir. The inlay cover showed a caricature picture of the Queen giving a vulgar gesture and drew unwanted attention from a national newspaper - one that featured as a puzzle in the game. "TV Game Snaps Di In The Bath - For Just £7" rang The Sun's headline. White produced a reported 5,000 copies, hoping that the topical content and air of notoriety would result in increased sales, but the Conservative MP for Leicester East Peter Bruinvels took a different view. He told the newspaper, "I think it is pretty sick and offensive." Along with the new games, came a new price bracket. A budget price no longer covered the overheads of the company.

It was an attempt to create a new range at a higher price. As we wrote all the games ourselves, provided all the marketing material, packaged everything, wrote the games and produced them, our time was growing less and less for little return to ourselves. This was an attempt to recoup some of that, as well as find a bigger market. The subject matters were not such a shift really - Spitting Image was huge on TV at the time and both games are very much in that style of humour.

After HRH, Gary Kelbrick left the company. With White on his own, bringing in other authors to the 8th Day fold seemed the correct thing to do, and it also helped offset the rising costs and diminishing returns of each game. Skelvellyn Twine and *The Raven* were the first non-White titles he released. Twine had originally been sent to Mike Gerrard of Your Sinclair magazine by Peter Pointen. He was so impressed that he convinced Pointen to send the game on to 8th Day and secure a publishing deal. *The Raven*, a Sherlock Holmes murder mystery written by Alan Bolger and Stephen Kee was developed using Gilsoft's *Professional Adventure Writer*. It made good use of the new tool, featuring pseudo-intelligent characters, a sophisticated parser and an intimidating sense of atmosphere as the events of the story moved along in real-time.

It was the attention to detail [in *The Raven*]. The clue sheet they gave me to evaluate it was massive - and I loved their passion about the game!

It was a game limited to the 128K versions of the Spectrum, and contained a hint of more to come in the packaging - the promise of being the first in a series of "Detective Tales". Unfortunately, the market was beginning to contract, so no further games were developed. Michael bowed out of the industry with a final game in 1988, *The Weaver of her Dreams*.

Weaver was always going to be the last game - the "reveal" at the end gave this away - the (spoilers) idea being that I was the weaver of the players dreams. It was a nice game to write and sold very well, but enough was enough. It was meant to be a business, not a hobby, and I could not justify the amount of my time it was taking.

Weaver was a game with female protagonist, one of the few adventures that promoted a change in gender. It reflected the many women that played and wrote adventure games. It was a fairly cliched story about a sorcerer in a dark tower, but showcased all of White's creative and technical abilities to date. One neat idea was a spell inventory that the player could draw upon to complete the game.

As for the female protagonist? Never thought about it really. It just seemed right at the time and fitted the "feel" of the game to me. Was it cliched? Probably. But I wanted a "classic" sword and sorcery kind of feel to it, though once you play it you will see that it's not that cliched at all - the wizard becomes the dragon, becomes the man etc.

With the adventure market dwindling, and without a *Quill*-style tool on the next generation of home computers, White had no desire to make the move to 16-bit computers and closed 8th Day. He has hopes for a new adventure writer for the Spectrum Next computer due for release in the summer of 2018. Perhaps we may see one of his many unfinished games - *Byte Your Thumb*, *Barf The Barbarian*, *Faerie 2: The Buggon's Gold* and *Ardonicus 3* [a demo of which was given away with one of his games].

Blimey - Byte your Thumb!! I had forgotten about that one! That was

1P



[Above] HRH. Any apparent resemblance to characters living or dead is entirely intentional.

a Spectrum BASIC adventure we abandoned once *The Quill* arrived and we decided to release a range of budget adventures.

Nothing unfortunately remains of any of the unfinished stuff, but there was an *Ardonicus* demo, yes. There were a few others too. *Bee's Knees*, a cute garden-based treasure hunt in which you were the bee.

Barf was a Conan style treasure hunt but with a very humorous bent. The treasures were all drinks, and you had to keep your 'inebriated' level above a certain amount or it was game over. Then there was

Skywych which was a follow-up to *Quann Tulla* and started with you deserted on an alien jungle planet. *Faerie 2* was an even bigger treasure hunt – all I can remember with this one is the witches house used to move around a lot!

Ardonicus 3 was a Westworld style adventure set on a space station with several hubs that held fantasy worlds for paying customers – it was a good way to fuse a sci-fi, western, fantasy adventure all into one!



DESERT ISLAND DUNGEONS

Michael White is the latest casualty of the adventuring high seas, alone on a desolate desert island with a ZX Spectrum and five games to keep his sanity.

Adventure
Crowther and Woods

Adventure Quest
Level 9

Velnor's Lair
Neptune Computing

Snowball
Level 9

Wishbringer
Infocom

THE ART OF TERRY GREER

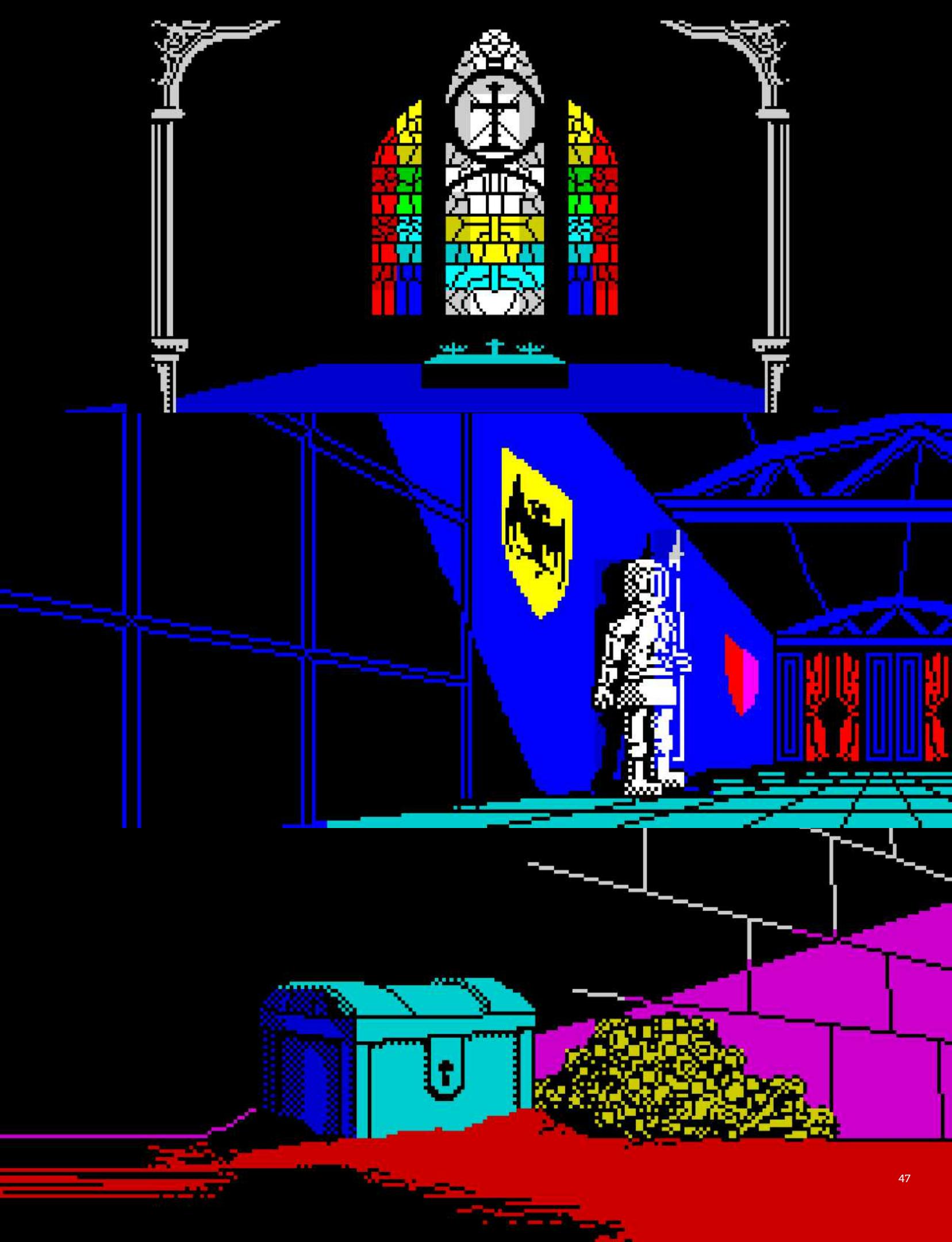
A veteran of the game industry, Terry Greer has produced some of the finest inlay and adventure location artwork for a plethora of companies, including Anirog, Gilsoft and Interceptor Micros.

Terry Greer's first experienced the games industry attempting to sell software for the short-lived Lynx computer. His games didn't sell, but the artwork he produced to promote his stand attracted the attention of fellow exhibitors. He formed a relationship with Interceptor Micros and created a raft of illustrations for their many adventures. Though he worked on the Amstrad and Commodore 64, his deft and skilful use of pixels and colour on the ZX Spectrum were his standout contribution.





Game: Heroes of Karn
Format: ZX Spectrum
Publisher: Interceptor Micros
Release Date: 1985



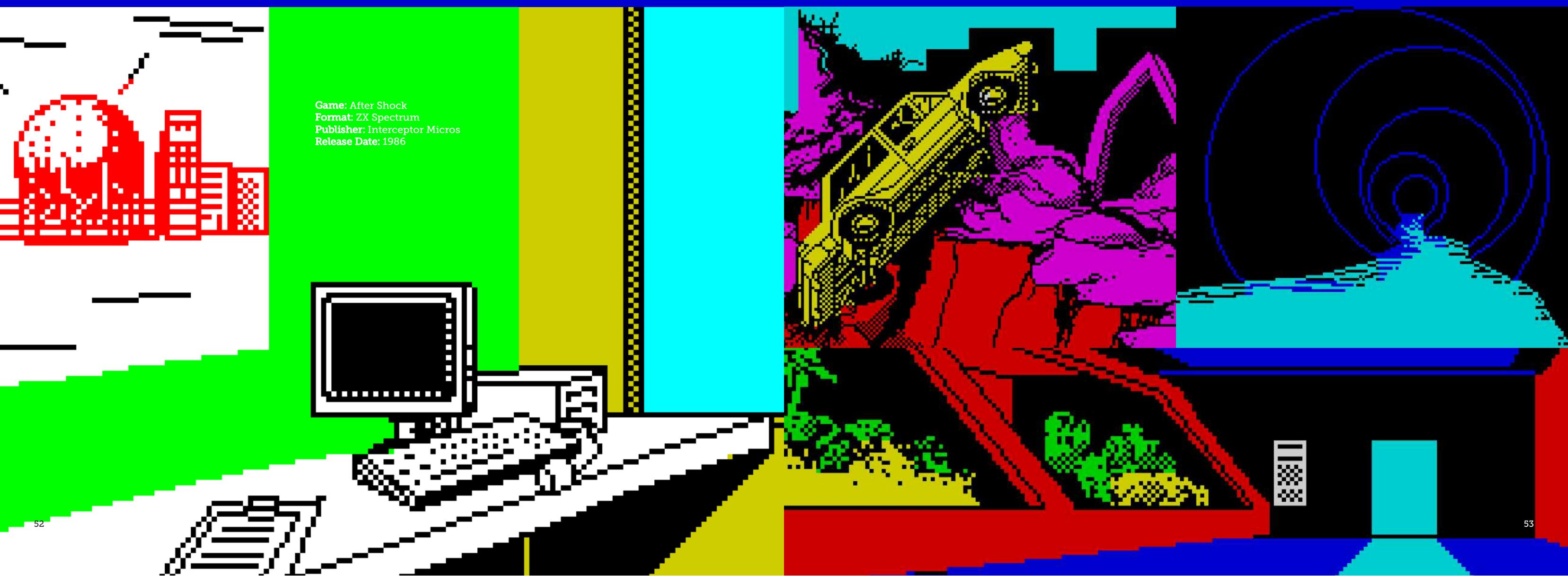


Game: Jewels of Babylon
Format: ZX Spectrum
Publisher: Interceptor Micros
Release Date: 1985

warLORD



Game: Warlord
Format: ZX Spectrum
Publisher: Interceptor Micros
Release Date: 1985



ZENOBI SOFTWARE

For almost three decades John Wilson ran Zenobi, an independent developer and publisher of ZX Spectrum text adventures. During this time, he galvanised an entire genre and was responsible for releasing over 250 games on his label. **Classic Adventurer** locks The Rochdale Balrog in the smallest room in the house and examines several unexplored puzzles.

Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, John Wilson served in the Royal Air Force that took him on a tour of the world, before settling in Rochdale in 1970. Work proved difficult after his service, spending 10 years in the building trade before finding himself redundant and retraining for a new role as a radio and television engineer. After the company he was working for closed down, John spent several years unemployed before attended a careers interview with a local job centre about his future. When pressed, all he could state was a desire "to run a software house", and with his belligerent personality that's what he went and did. Zenobi Software was founded in 1985.

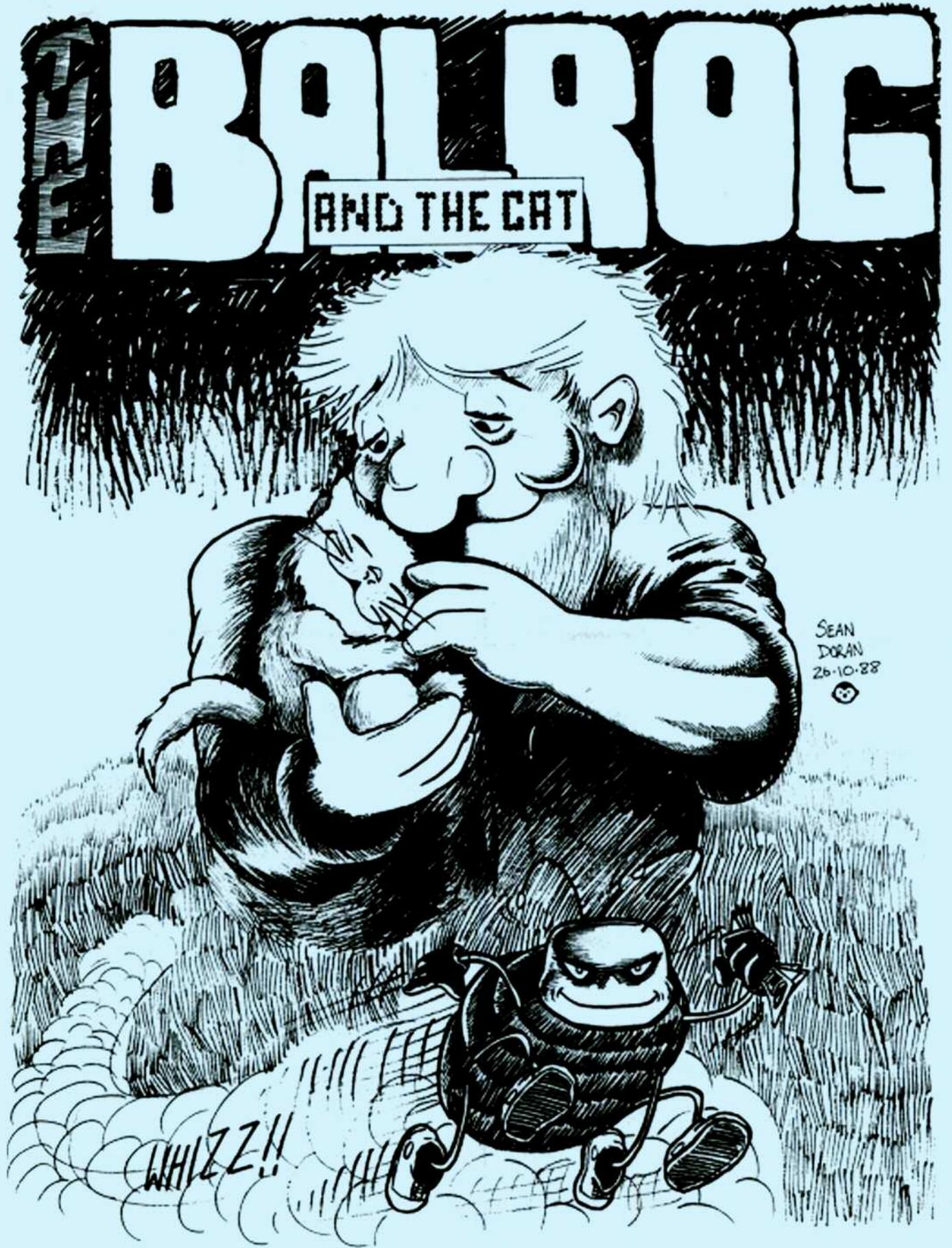
[John] [The Zenobi] name came from a character in the very first text-adventure I ever played - Carnell Software's *Black Crystal*. I played that on a ZX81 and in the latter stages of the game (it is a multi-part) there is a mini text-adventure. In this you encounter a 'helpful sprite' named Zenobi and the name stuck in my head. When the cat (or kitten as it was at that time) entered my life Zenobi seemed the ideal name for her.

Black Crystal was one of the first adventure games around at the time. What others did you play? Did you ever experience them original Adventure?

[I] never played the original Adventure and still haven't. My earliest influences were based around the type-in listings that used to appear the computer mags of the day - most of which were more to fun type-in than actually play.

Adventures certainly featured heavily in magazines as type-in listings, and they taught many programming concepts. Do you think





that it contributed to their emerging popularity?

There is a good chance it was, as most of have a story (or two) in our head and the utilities of that time enabled the 'story' to be shown to a bigger audience whilst opening up a possible doorway to fame and fortune.

By 1985 we'd seen some very influential titles on home computer adventuring, notably games such as *The Hobbit*. How important were these games – in both terms of the genre, and setting the bar in what was expected from an adventure game?

The likes of *The Hobbit* were important but only because they showed the budding authors just what could be achieved within the confines of a text-adventure. Thereby laying a basic blueprint for them to follow.

Did you have ideas for adventures and design before?

The thought of writing my own games had never crossed my mind. However I was given a copy of *The Quill* by a friend who told me it was a doddle to write a game with it. I checked it out and wrote [An] *Everyday Tale of a Seeker of Gold* with that particular copy - albeit sans manual. From there on in I was hooked.

Even with your experimentation with type-in listings, had you tried to code a game of your own?

The nearest I came to experimenting was typing in listings from the likes of ZX Programmer or such like. Machine code was and still is beyond my grasp and the prospect of producing a game via that format scared me silly.

John's first games were *The Secret of Little Hodcombe*, a story about an aunt, and the inheritance of an evil cottage, and *An Everyday Tale Of A Seeker of Gold*. He initially tried to publish the games with Mastertronic and Alternative Software but was turned off by the poor level of royalties offered that he felt didn't reward his endeavour. He told Retro Gamer magazine "It was one of the driving forces behind my decision to branch out on my own."

An Everyday Seeker of Gold introduced Bulbo Baggins in a spoof of *The Hobbit*. Tolkien it seemed was an obvious influence on writers at the time, along with a diet of Dungeons and Dragons. Was it the natural thing for you to parody those titles?

At this point I had never read Tolkien or played Dungeons & Dragons or *The Hobbit* - it was simply down to wanting to write something similar to [Fergus] McNeill's *The Boggit* [released earlier in the same year by CRL]. I had been given that game as a birthday present and so enjoyed it. All I really knew was that the storyline I wanted to follow featured a quest for gold and a bloody big Dragon!

Can you tell me more about your adventure design process? You've discussed it before, and it seemed to be formal at the beginning, but then move to something more organic, unplanned and unscripted, yet the outcomes were incredibly tight?

When I first wrote *Everyday* I spent days drawing maps and listing puzzles (and their solutions) before loading up *The Quill*. I also tried this approach with *Hodcombe* but I found with both of them I got sidetracked and then had to redraw and re-list everything in order to include the latest idea that had just come into my head. I also tried to write the ending first and then write the game to obtain that ending's approach but, as usual, got sidetracked again. Eventually I adopted the 'I have a story in my head so just sit down, load up *The Quill* and

[Left] Sean Doran's wonderful pen and ink artwork featured on photocopied instruction sheets included in many Zenobi releases. He also created loading screen graphics for games such as *Bulbo* and *The Lizard King* and *The Labours of Hercules*.

get on with it' attitude. I made up the locations, puzzles, solutions and dialogue as I went along. I still do this to this day - I am currently working on an enhanced version of *Behind Closed Doors* for Chris Ainsley and I am writing that on-the-go as per normal. Nothing about me has changed since the 80s, I still use the same old characters, the same old settings and the same old humour I have always used. If I wrote a new game today the player would swear they were back in the 80s.

Who did you trust to do your playtesting? Did you take for criticism well? Was it akin to having a book going out to a good editor?

All the games were sent out to around 6-8 different playtesters (a cross-section of known customers) and bug-reports were received from them all. These reports were then sent to the various authors and they were asked to make the necessary corrections before re-submitting their games. This took place on a number of occasions - until the playtesters were happy. Criticism was always welcome.

Did you have any adventure writing rules? Any 10 commandments of adventuring?

No rules other than ... make it entertaining!!

What was the average development time for a game?

If it was one of my own then anything from two weeks to six months. For a third-party game about three months from me first receiving it.

The impact of *The Quill* cannot be understated, and it's difficult to envisage the British adventure game industry without it. Its main advantage to the cottage industry coders of the time was it being royalty free. There was no charge to developers of games using it, unless many other pieces of software at the time - such as speed loaders such as Speedlock, or even music systems such as Melbourne House's Music Machine - all required a licence fee to be paid. How important was Graeme Yeandle's creation, and the fact that you were free to distribute games?

Very, very important. Without it I would never have formed Zenobi Software or ever written any of my own games. It enabled a lot of gifted 'storytellers' to produce some very good text-adventure.

The thought of [royalties] never entered my mind until now. I had never considered the fact that you did not pay Gilsoft any royalties on the games produced using *The Quill* - so, no it was not a major factor.

1986 and 87 were perhaps the pinnacle years of 8-bit text adventuring in Britain. Level 9 was rampant, and *The Big Sleaze*, *Bugsy*, and Magnetic Scroll's *The Pawn* all appeared. Did you play other author's games? Did you look upon any for influences in trends, themes, or even technology?

The only authors whose games I played were Fergus McNeill (religiously), Interceptor Micros and Brian Howarth. The rest of the time I chose a game because of its content/storyline - regardless of who wrote it - never in order to be influenced in any way.

I tried to make the games that 'entertaining' that the players did not care about the constraints of the format.

Which games ranked amongst your favourites - you've said *The Jewels of Babylon*, *Rigel's Revenge* and *Rebel Planet* - which others? Which other authors did you admire? I presume Delta 4 and Fergus McNeill would be a shared soul with his love of humour?

There are way too many favourites to list. I was an ardent player in the early years of Zenobi Software and when I was not writing I was playing - often long into the night.

What's one adventure you wish you'd written?

There isn't one ... I have written all the adventures I wanted to and covet nobody else's work.

Releases came thick and fast and in 1988, John himself in the guise

Small flies buzzed over-head and numerous small ants scurried to and fro across the bare stone tiles that formed the floor of the small wooden dwelling that the mighty Balrog was presently occupying. Somebody had once made an attempt to add a touch of decorum but the coat of paint they had liberally applied to walls had seen better days and was peeling off in large flakes.

***STAND**
Balrog stood up, rubbed some feeling back into his nether regions and wondered why toilet seats nearly always cut off the circulation to your bum!

PULL UP PANTS

[Behind Closed Doors] The poor old Balrog, locked inside the smallest room in the house (or outhouse in this case) and running low on toilet paper. Can he escape? When an adventure's first two moves are STAND and PULL UP PANTS then you know it is a work of utter genius.

Bulbo stood in the middle of a small but busy 'Market Place'. The sound of trading filled his ears and in front of him was a coarse wooden platform, on which stood a number of men. Beyond it to the north was a wooden gate, whilst to the south lay a fine stone archway.

Bulbo saw ...
A Giant
An Elf
An Archer
A Wizard
A Dwarf
A Thief
A Swordsman

[Bulbo and the Lizard King] When it was given away free with issue 49 of Your Sinclair magazine, *Bulbo and the Lizard King* was a delightfully easier game that introduced a brand new audience to text adventuring.

Bulbo was in a neat, tidy and very comfortable little burrow. In the corner was the standard green door, whilst to the left was a small round window. From the oven wafted the delightful aroma of freshly baked brown cakes.
Bulbo noticed ...

**A coil of rope.
A wooden chest.**

[An Everyday Tale of a Seeker of Gold] Zenobi's Bulbo joined Delta 4's Bimbo in parodying JRR Tolkien's and Melbourne House's *The Hobbit* in this spoof tale of treasure hunting and dragon slaying.

of "The Balrog" appeared in *Behind Closed Doors*. Quickly becoming a cult classic, *Behind Closed Doors* tapped into everyone's worst nightmare, the moment you sit down in tranquil peace and quiet in the smallest room in the house, only to have someone lock the door from the outside.

Behind Closed Doors is one of my favourite adventures. We've all been stuck in that location reading *The Goblin Gazette* (though now it'll be on iPad) for a long time – did the idea come to you from one of those experiences? Art imitating life?

Behind Closed Doors came about simply because I decided to add a second game to the other side of the latest cassette. It was to be a freebie for the player (the main game was on Side A) and just one of those ideas that came into my head. Basically it was based on an old nursery rhyme "Two old ladies locked in the lavatory" and I just substituted myself for the two old ladies and added few of the characters from my own games.

Though the game does take place in a single location, that wasn't the motivation for creating the title as some reported?

Actually I wanted to write/produce a game in less than 24 hours (just to see if it could be done). The rest, as they say, is history.

Bulbo and The Lizard King arrived as John's second part in his Balrogian Trilogy (the third game being a Lord of the Rings-esque tale of *Fuddo & Sam*). The irksome Bulbo was again off on a treasure hunt. Released as a standalone game, it was later given away free by magazine Your Sinclair on a covertape in an attempt to push the Zenobi name into the mainstream arena.

By the time *Bulbo* appeared on the front of Your Sinclair quite a few copies had already been sold – the 'cover-tape' thing was simply a bit of an ego-trip for me and that is why I chose it. To be honest it brought in some extra sales but not in the numbers that some people thought it might.

Later, the good relationship with Your Sinclair was examined further. Gareth Pitchford, author of *Twilight Inventory* explains "I think one of John Wilson, of Zenobi's, masterstrokes was putting together the first *Best of the Indies* compilation for Your Sinclair readers.

That first discounted cassette, featuring Tartan's *Double Agent*, Linda Wright's *Cloud 99*, Terry Taylor's *The Labours of Hercules*, Jack Lockerby's *Domes of Sha* and two of Zenobi's own titles was surely responsible for introducing a lot of players to the range and quality of homebrewed adventure games."

Between 1986 and 1989 Zenobi published upwards of 50 titles, with other authors contracted to the Balrog's stables. John realised quickly that to be a viable games publishing business the churn of titles had to be more frequent. He was balancing the logistics of working with external authors, producing duplicates of cassettes and the ephemera that goes with each game, whilst still writing his own adventures.

How time consuming was it to fully run a software house? How did you manage to balance the various tasks?

At the busiest it meant I was doing an 18 hour day and for a few years not even my own family saw a great deal of me. I produced everything that came with the games - printed leaflets, cassette inlay etc as well as duplicating all the tapes myself. [I] had a bank of 'twin-deck' tape-recorders running six hours a day sometimes.

Did you ever enjoy the logistic side of running the business over writing? Was it a case of needs must to provide the finances and grow the label?

Never ever enjoyed the logistics side - but it had to be done in order to put food in the family's bellies and a roof over their heads

Apart from the Your Sinclair relationship you never advertised in the main magazines at the time. How did you generate the require sales of games?

Deep, crisp snow covered these 'Icy Wastelands' and a sharp, biting wind blew relentlessly. To the north could be seen an 'Icy Slope' whilst to the west lay a 'Snowy Path'. It was also possible to climb, with care, up to the top of a nearby Mountain. Fuddo could see ...

The 'ICE CROWN'

A savagely cold wind blew across the 'Icy Wastelands' and instant 'Death' was almost a relief from the evil chill which froze the blood in Fuddo's veins ... almost but not quite!

[Fuddo and Slam] A sequel of sorts to *An Everyday Tale of a Seeker of Gold*, *Fuddo and Slam* starts with Bulbo returning home, laden with treasure. Unfortunately he manages to lose the lot, and the fabled ring of power - so it's up to Fuddo and Slam, in a Lord of the Rings way to get it all back.

Something stirred in the depths of the moat.

***X MAP**
Totally blank, apart from some words printed along the top.

***X POUCH**
Formed from faded-velvet, there was some holes around the top where a drawstring had once been and some tiny red letters across the middle.

***READ LETTERS**
Though faded with age, the words MAGIC BAG were still clearly to be seen. Beneath them were the words Property of Small Daniels.

[Retarded Creatures and Caverns] A fiendish opening "locked door" puzzle left many players wondering whether *Retarded* was another single location game, but the tale soon widened, delving into the dreaded caverns in one of John's tougher adventures.



A chill wind whistles through the snow laden pines above. You stand on the southern edge of a frozen lake. A wooden walk way to the north leads out to a dark castle on a small island. You can go north, west.

[Lightmare: Village of Delvhorn] Scott Johnson attempted to self-publish *Lightmare* in 1989. The magazine review was spotted by John Wilson and became the first Zenobi-published game to contain location graphics.

I used to do regular mailshots - at least once a month - to all past customers and the rest of the time it was down to advertising in the fanzines of the time.

Did you ever regret the decision not to find a publisher for your work – allowing you to concentrate on writing?

Never, Zenobi was my baby and I did not trust anybody else with her.

The first non-Wilson game that Zenobi released was Scott Johnson's *The Lightmare - Village of Delvhorn*. Johnson had attempted to self-publish the title, having sent review copies to Crash and Your Sinclair. It didn't review favourably, but the Balrog saw something in the title that he liked.

Now that the Zenobi name was out there, both in the adventure community and wider with your magazine coverage, did you start to receive any games submitted for publication? Any memorable stinkers? Any you overlooked that went elsewhere to become successful?

On average I would receive about half a dozen a week at the peak of things and each one would be passed on to the playtesters for evaluation. There were one or two 'stinkers' - mainly down to the content and lack of storyline - but the vast majority of them were worthy of a second chance. As far as I am aware I never overlooked any that became successful elsewhere. People were only too happy to sign-up with Zenobi Software because we paid out good 'upfront' payments and good royalty fees per game.

Lightmare was a departure for you too - it was also your first game to feature graphics. Did graphics deviate from the pure craft?

Never been that fond of graphics but that is probably because I personally was never that good at producing them. However they do have their place in certain games, especially when well-drawn.

Do you also think it contributed to worse games? Text and graphics into 32 or 48K of RAM always led to multi-part games and some dire graphics?

I do think that the inclusion of graphics in a text-adventure could be to the detriment of the 'text' at times and personally speaking 'multi-parters' were the devil's spawn.

Did the marketplace at the time deem the move to graphic adventures over text only? Especially with the earlier successes of *The Hobbit*?

I think so, people came to demand more fancy artwork for their money and wanted to see what their nice new shiny computers were capable of. Any old machine could churn out boring text.

Lightmare received a lacklustre review and a score of 54% from Crash. You still opted to contact Scott and publish the game. How did you view the game differently to the review? You did pride yourself on your rigorous appraisal of games that you would publish?

That was a low score in my opinion but upon reflection the game did lack a bit of gameplay. It is quite a short adventure after all.

Was there a difference between mainstream coverage of games and how you, and the actual adventure players received a game? The Gerrards and Mike Brewster had a reputation for being tough to impress?

I do not believe so, as both the Mikes were players themselves and I respected their opinions highly.

Retarded Creatures and Caverns was your only game to receive a Your Sinclair Megagame? What difference to sales did a good review in Crash or Your Sinclair make?

A good review could influence sales but not a lot. The adventure players of this world like to make up their own minds and usually based their purchases on their own thinking. Most of the time the



worthy of payment.

You published several games by female authors. Was this important – how many players were female?

In my humble opinion there was a split down the middle in regards to the male/female player situation. In fact I would say that over the years my more regular customers were of the female persuasion. So female authors were more than welcome in the Zenobi fold.

Zenobi powered onwards, well into the 1990s and well beyond what many saw as the active commercial life of the ZX Spectrum. The main publishers began to abandon 8-bit machines in the early decade, deciding to concentrate on the Amiga, Atari ST and consoles.

Adventures though, had been ignored by the majority of big publishers since the mid 1980s. That was to the benefit of Zenobi and other homebrew and independent game authors.

Nothing really changed, the big publishers never really handled the sort of stuff Zenobi did and we just continued much in the same manner we always had.

When did the market peak for Zenobi? What type of sales could be achieved?

The late 80s early 90s was probably our best period and at one time we were churning out in excess of 1000 tapes per week. I used to lug a couple of carrier-bags full of jiffy-bags to the local post office every day.

[The demise of text adventures] I think it was simply down to the public being swayed towards the fancy graphics that their shiny new machines were now capable of producing. The 'point-n-click' graphic-adventure took over and the good old text-adventure just lost out.

Adventure Probe and other magazines were still doing good business and conventions were still popular. Did the continual thriving fanzines show that the genre still had some life left in it?

Not really, the readers of the fanzines were more into solutions, tips etc than actual reviews - that and reading the wistful meanderings of some twisted minds.

good reviews were a 'stroking' of my ego.

Retro Gamer recently covered Zenobi in a company look-back and rated *The Golden Locket* as your worst adventure game – was that fair?

A tad unfair - the author in question was new to the scene and still learning his trade. He produced a playable game with some interesting problems, albeit set at a 'beginners' level.

Did you have a good relationship with the magazines at the time?

I had a very good relationship with the like of ZX Computing and Your Sinclair but not as good a one with Crash as I would have liked.

Your own experiences at trying to get a game published greatly influenced how you dealt with other authors under the Zenobi banner – can you tell me more about that?

Prior to forming Zenobi Software I submitted *Everyday* to Smart Egg Software for possible publication. They contacted me with a list of amendments to the game and I did these accordingly. Upon re-submission they offered me a contract but with royalty payments that I felt to be insulting. It was then that I decided to strike out on my own and that any authors I signed up would receive a royalty fee

ADVENTURON NOTES

John Wilson is currently revisiting his own authored Zenobi adventures using Chris Ainsley's modern browser based text adventure authoring system called Adventuron.

Some even have graphics ...

Visit www.zenobi.co.uk for the latest updates, and access Adventuron at www.eeyo.io/adv781/



1000 tapes per week suddenly became a 100 or so, and then down to double digit sales. It was obvious at this point that the market no longer desired what John was doing despite arguably releasing some of the most innovative titles such as *Crack City* that really pushed the capabilities of PAWS. Still, the old dog tried the new tricks, and invested in an Amiga and PC.

Unfortunately, there wasn't a suitable adventure writing utility on the new machines that John could turn to in order to author new games. Gilsoft had decided to abandon the industry, taking any plans for a 16-bit version of PAWS with them.

Did the 16-bit market suffer from a lack of a *Quill/PAWS* utility (it did have *STAC* on the ST?)

Definitely, I tried *STAC* but that was not a patch on *The Quill*. Had there been a *Quill* on the 16 bit machines I would have written a load of games for them.

Instead, Zenobi games were repacked and launched for the 16-bit machines using ZX Spectrum emulation. Sales were disappointingly poor.

Just a shade but by then I was losing my 'drive' and quite content to stick with what I knew best ... hence the 'emulation' side of things.

Zenobi came to an end in 1997. A long run for any software house, yet alone an adventure-centric one. The Zenobi "legacy" is often talked about, and it should be recognised as such. It seemed that Zenobi never sat comfortably where it did. Half in the mainstream publications, half in the homegrown arena. It was this desire to be professional and to maintain the highest standards that John sometimes comes across as elusive, and a difficult character to deal with. Blooded-minded may also spring to mind, but in order to run a business it's often the mindset that is required. Gareth Pitchford sums it up perfectly. "[John] set the standard for customer service and proved that, by delivering quality titles to a dedicated audience, text adventures had a far longer life than the mainstream publishing companies had predicted."

What are your own thoughts on your achievements? What are your highs and lows from your career?

I am very, very, very proud of everything to do with Zenobi Software



and what we achieved over the years. It provided me and my family with a living for the best part of 30 years and that is something to be proud of. The high was getting my very first review - Tony Bridge (PCW) and the low was closing the doors on my little Empire in 2012.

Do you think that the adventure scene allowed the expression and sometimes eccentricity of British writers and game designers – empowered by *The Quill* and the Spectrum especially?

I do indeed. There have been some very good writers come out of the 'adventure-scene' over the years and some games that I have been very proud to be associated with. All of them full of good old British wit and charm.

What are your memories of the British adventure community – with

FREEBIES



it's fanzines and conventions?

To me it was what I laughingly referred to as a 'Knitting-circle' and not something that I ever really regarded myself as being part of, so I have no real memories of it - fond or otherwise.

Do you also think that it's overlooked when we talk about games in Britain – adventures were huge at one point, often in the top sales charts?

Yes, adventures were never given the critical acclaim they should have received but at least they are/were out there to be discovered and enjoyed.

Why the fascination, or is it, obsession with Balrogs?

It simply stems from the fact that it was what Mike Gerrard christened me in one of his articles - the Rochdale Balrog - and it stuck. Since then I have been 'The Rochdale Balrog' and in that guise I am reasonably immune from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

Are there any stories/adventures that remain unfinished? Or partly-designed? What hit the cutting-room floor?

Only one called *Ramsbottom Smith & The Quest For The Yellow Spheroid*. I started back in the 80s and never, ever completed. The 'work-in-progress' tape is in my office upstairs ... somewhere!!!!

Why do you think that adventures still pose a fascination for players, and that Zenobi games still command respect and high prices whenever they come up for sale?

No idea whatsoever, I personally would not pay the sort of money they do for a 30 year old cassette-tape when they can have the whole damn catalogue for free.

Surely there is scope for one more Balrog adventure?

Not in the old format, however over the years I have written various things online such as 'Behind Closed Doors 5', 'Behind Closed Doors 6' and 'Bulbos Journey'.



DESERT ISLAND DUNGEONS

The Rochdale Balrog **John Wilson** and the goodship Zenobi have sailed into trouble waters, far beyond the safety of the River Roch. What would he be marooned with?

Just a copy of *The Quill*, a tape-deck, some blank tapes and my imagination.

After all, the resultant options are endless.

Format: Atari ST
Publisher: Rainbird
Developer: Magnetic Scrolls
Release Date: 1988



FISH!

Between 1985 and 1991 Magnetic Scrolls released seven classic adventure games. Swimming amongst the shoals of swords, sorcery, thieving guilds and corrupt businesses came a surreal pun-laden game about a goldfish secret agent co-written by former Your Sinclair journalist Phil "Snouty" South.

Phil South and John Molloy both lived in Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire and met in 1980. They both shared a love of adventures, playing games on John's Apple II, harbouring ambitions of one day writing their own game.

When *The Hobbit* arrived it changed the way they thought about adventure games and what could be possible in the genre.

[Phil South] [The Hobbit] was massive, it brought the genre to the



[Above] At the outset of the game you are presented with one of the problems of being in a goldfish bowl, you're upside down!

notice of regular gamers. Plus it was wicked cool to play considering the types of games that were available at the time, a whole new non-realtime experience and that's why it is so fondly remembered by people who were around at the time. Plus it seemed to work by magic, all these locations and items; where do they live? It seemed impossible.

Had you any early attempts at writing adventures?

I have had a few tries at designing another game, but solo designing is hard work. Much better when you have partners nagging you for jokes or puzzles, and you have plenty of energy to keep going, sparking off each other like that. I still have a handful of undeveloped ideas. I did [write] a cave adventure using GAC [Sean Ellis' Graphic Adventure Creator] for a friend's birthday once. Nothing since, but I lost interest in adventure gaming for a longish while when my kids were growing up.

Both landed dream jobs for kids of that era. Phil pursued a career in journalism, and entered the games industry in 1986 when he joined popular ZX Spectrum magazine Your Sinclair. John, on the other hand "somehow" landed a job at Magnetic Scrolls testing and debugging their first raft of adventures including *The Pawn* and *The Guild of Thieves*.

They shared a bus ride to their respective places of work, and though Phil was unaware of John's actual job they passed the journey time talking about adventure games.

We were basically riffing on the idea of "What Would Be The Hardest Way To Start An Adventure?" I said okay You are a Goldfish in a bowl. Get out of that. We laughed a lot. Then we started to figure out okay seriously what would be the ways you could get out of that? We came up with a few interesting answers. At the end of the journey John said do you mind if I pitch this idea to Anita? I said sure, whatever, and who is Anita?

Anita Sinclair, the co-founder of Magnetic Scrolls and the rest of the team loved the idea – and before he knew it Phil was sat in their London office alongside Peter Kemp – a civil servant and fellow Apple II gamer – to mull over the proposition for what would become *Fish!*

I was the only one of the three of us who was a professional writer at that point. John had been a good writer for years but never really sold anything. Pete wrote stuff but his role was more of a catalyst. I think we are all catalysts in that sense. It only worked because we see eye to eye on a number of things and enjoy making each other laugh.

Was there a mystique to the company?

Most definitely. It was located in a dark side street in south London. Not sure if I ever went there during the day so in my mind it's like Jack The Ripper country. It was a very cool place and a very cool bunch of people. Every second I was working for them I was concerned they'd find out I didn't belong and throw me out.

He had nothing to worry about. The initial pitch had been so impressive that Anita Sinclair personally became a big supporter of the project, pushing it wherever possible, internally and whenever she talked to the press.

[Anita Sinclair] I love *Fish!*! It was completely ridiculous. *Fish!* is wonderful. No one else in the world could have done *Fish!* except us. It's such a great game.

I don't know what John told Anita. Whatever it was it must have been amazing because she was really behind it all the way. Maybe he bigged up my abilities as a writer. I really hope I met with whatever expectations Johnnie enthused them with. I'm pretty sure we developed a treatment like you would for a film, with a basic outline of the different phases of the game. The details were added later as we wrote the thing.

In *Fish!* you were part of a crack inter-dimensional agency trying to

stop a dangerous group of anarchists called The Seven Deadly Fins. Each agent had a special power called warping - the ability to jump between the bodies of different living things and take control of them. In your pursuit of the Fins, Mission HQ had decided you needed a break, and the most restful place to be between assignments was "warped" into the body of a goldfish. Your idyllic holiday is rudely interrupted when your boss, Rear-Admiral Sir Playfair Panchax contacts you to tell you that the Fins are up to no good again, and you're the only one who can stop them.

John came up with the core design, along with Pete. I was off working for YS so I missed great big scads of the development, but I would turn up at the office and type into the document. The document was the text bits of the game, and I think there were tags or something identifying which bit went where. When I was working on it I remember sitting for a very long time at the console, reading a basic bit of text which described the action then rewriting it with jokes and description. Then having to rewrite that because Steggles and John would get cross that I just spoiled one of the carefully constructed puzzles. John and Rob Steggles were the brains of the outfit. Pete and I had lots of ideas and some writing chops but no real grasp on the mechanics of it. Actually I'm sure Pete knew more than me. I was like that annoying enthusiastic puppy who bounces around the environment knocking over vases and table lamps until someone shouted at him. Usually Steggles or Anita.

The writing took the plot to a very British place - and its influences were obvious with smatterings of Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy surrealism.

Hitchhikers was an influence, [but] we [had] a pretty surreal sense of humour anyway, having grown up in the era of the Goons and Monty Python, so yeah that too. Terry Pratchett was a big influence on me personally and John too, a bit of that shows up in the text of the game I think.

And each of the writer's backgrounds came into play, especially John Molloy who was a musician. The opening scenes have the player warp into a recording studio where many of the game's characters have a sense of being based upon real people.

Yeah there are some cameos all through the game apparently, especially in the Recording Studio segment. I either can't remember who they represented or perhaps I wasn't told because I'm a blabbermouth.

The opening sequences of *Fish!* offered the player a choice of three warps, each leading to different mini-adventures that could be completed in any order. The puzzles were compartmentalised, but it must have been a headache for a game designer?

As far as I could see a lot of it was in John's head. There were big, big printouts of all the text on folded rolls of lineprinter paper with the holes down the side. We'd do a lot of the debugging on paper, and we'd take those rolls home and go through them with a pen and make notes on the paper. Then go back to the office and painstakingly transcribe what we'd edited back into the VAX computer, which sat humming away in the background like a huge fridge.

Did you map much of it out?

There were a few maps I think, but it wasn't a maze really and most locations were separate so there were small maps of each of the warp zones. The puzzles weren't that complex either really, and John was the Puzzle Meister.

The Ken Gordon designed development environment at Magnetic Scrolls was complex, with a mixture of DEC VAX, Mac and Xenix machines all catering for cross-compilation for each of the different target machines. How difficult was it to get to grips with?

They trained us up on their development system and told us what could and couldn't be done. Of course John soaked this up like a sponge and it bounced off me like a rubber ball. I learned a huge amount from them about interactive fiction and how it works and

what it could be. Any love I have for the genre was put there by Anita and Ken and John.

Rob Steggles told L'avventura è l'avventura in an interview "I worked with the three of them for three months or so to add in a few fishy puns, change a few things here and there, tweak and adjust. With Richard Huddy, Bob Cole and Paul Findley on the team too, it didn't feel like work." How much of an influence on the design was the Scrolls team?

Anita and Ken were massively supportive. Rob Steggles knew more about IF than I ever would and was multi-talented, writing, coding etc. Plus a wicked Blood Bowl competitor.

They pretty much gave us carte blanche to do whatever we wanted. The only times they'd reign us in is when what we were proposing wasn't technically possible. Ken would have this look. He's a very dry

Scotsman and he'd let you know, amusingly and articulately, that what you were proposing was bollocks.

The game has a nice balance in the difficulty of its puzzles. Each of the opening mini-adventures for example ranged in difficulty, and being able to try them in any order enabled the player's skill to evolve. Was that one of the more difficult things to target – the capability of player?

I think it was about a year [to develop]. We spent a lot of time testing and talking it through. If it has any balance it's down to Rob and John as they spent the most time in the office juggling the text and flow of the game. We'd pool ideas and talk things through but they did all the donkey work as Pete and I had day jobs.

The wonderful graphics were a trademark of Magnetic Scrolls games. Were they produced independently of the game's text?

The graphics were an essential part of the Mag Scrolls look and feel, making use of the graphics on the Amiga and ST especially. They set the scene, and I really loved them. The graphics were done entirely separately and Anita did all the producing on that aspect of it. The artist sent them in.

Jimmy Maher's excellent article on *Fish!* says that you adjusted puzzles frequently, in some cases dropping them all together. What ideas, themes and puzzles hit the cutting room floor?

I don't recall any deleted scenes, in fact playing the game recently I was surprised how much I'd forgotten that is actually in the game. I remember a bathroom puzzle that didn't make the cut but thinking about it I suspect I might be mixing it up with a pitch I did to Revolution a few years later.

The critics received *Fish!* with delight. The One magazine said it was

"certainly [Magnetic Scrolls'] most enjoyable [adventure] to date", Amiga Computing said "another first-class adventure" and Commodore User said "[*Fish!*] would have you gurgling with mirth, until air bubbles trickle up your cheeks." Unfortunately the market and player's tastes were beginning to change. Despite being released for the lucrative christmas period in 1988 and winning C+VG's "Best 16-Bit Adventure" Golden Joystick Award, sales were low.

A critical success, but a financial flop – would you have those two reversed if possible? Which platform was most successful?

If I had to guess I'd say Amiga and ST were the best sellers. But it sold so few overall it'd be hard to find out. I'm a bit of an egomaniac on the quiet so critical acclaim every time. This is why I have always been broke.

Ultimately it seemed the specific style of humour drove a wedge





between players and reviewers alike. It strayed from the usual realms of adventures, and was a departure for Magnetic Scrolls, for sure.

[A] marmite effect definitely. That was one of the keynotes of the original conversation, that it had to be a non-D&D solution. Maybe sci-fi, but comedy sci-fi perhaps. My sense of humour has a very marmite-like effect on people. You either love it or you hate it. Another reason I'm not the richest person I know.

Rainbird chose to market the game with an unusual sized box, different to every other Magnetic Scrolls release. The lightweight cardboard gave it a cheaper and less lux appeal than the other titles before it. Then there was the game's theme - a marketing nightmare. Portraying dungeons, dragons, and a treasure quest to potential buyers was easy.

Personally I liked the art but it was not my first choice. I really liked

"My sense of humour has a very marmite-like effect on people. You either love it or you hate it. Another reason I'm not the richest person I know."

the Fish Police comics and I favoured a more sort of adult cartoonish style. Either that or a similar scary circus vibe like *Jinxter*. I would have preferred something a bit darker or surreal.

The game box did contain a selection of "feelies", an extensive manual, advice on how to look after your fish and a fish identification sheet. Did you have any input on what else went into the packaging?

Some, but Johnnie already had a very clear idea about what should be in the box. I may have consulted on it but as far as I recall he did all that in a flurry when we were nearing completion. He did all the artwork etc. The baby picture is one of his sons.

You said you've recently been back to play it. How was it?

Very recently I have come back to IF and I started playing it again about a month or so ago. I was amazed at how good it is. Plus I have no clue if any of the jokes I was enjoying are mine or John's or Pete's. There are some I remember, and John did the Sic Transit Gloria Monday joke. Apart from that it's all smooshed together over the countless revisions.

Would you change anything? What are your favourite bits of the game?

I can't think of anything I'd add or take away. It's pretty much what we intended. I find the recording studio a bit weird as it's based on a studio we used to go to when John's band DON'T PANIC were recording at The Roundhouse. Yeah and Don't Panic is a HHGTTG reference. To be honest one of the reasons I was playing it is I'd forgotten most of it and revisiting it has been a joy. I look forward to finishing it but I'm pretty sure I'll have to consult a walkthrough to actually get there.

It must be pleasing that critically then and now it is still regarded as Magnetic Scroll's best adventure – a fine accolade amongst such terrific company?

Yeah and surprising as they made a lot of very good games. I'm proud to have been a part of it, and it's one of the most gratifying and cool things I've ever done. Plus I met some of the best people while doing it, Anita, Ken, Rob, Michael Bywater, the code guys (whose names escape me at this second). It's a shame we never got to do *Fish 2* . . .

After its release, the majority of *Fish!* protagonists left the game, the company and the industry behind. Magnetic Scrolls struggled to find its place in an ever-changing market as point-and-click adventures such as LucasArt's *The Secret of Monkey Island* signposted the future for adventure gaming.

I think the death of IF was a move towards graphic adventure, and the general kind of laziness that modern media engenders. The move from text input to mouse clicking meant that people could get more entertainment with less effort. Cognitively speaking typing words engages more of the brain than mouse clicking and actually makes you smarter as you play as a consequence. The internet gaming we've seen since then has only made that worse.

Of course there is a new backlash against 3D mouse clicking games and back more into 2D or text games, at least for certain players. Lots of new IF developers have sprung up and the market is growing. People crave a bit more engagement and "theatre of the mind" which is lacking from a lot of modern gaming genres. People are playing more board games too now. This can only be a good thing for the future of mankind.

What impact did Anita Sinclair have on the industry – she's an under-celebrated heroine of British games?

She is and I wish she'd gotten the chance to do all the things she planned. She's a tenacious one and whatever she's doing I'm sure she'll be at the top of the heap and calling the shots.

What about Magnetic Scrolls – what is their legacy? Text adventures are usually overlooked in any history – apart from *Adventure*?

Magnetic Scrolls regularly get talked about on the [community] pages I hang about in. They are well thought of and fondly remembered. Hopefully some of their stories will be retold in other media. I hope some day there will be enough interest in their work that someone would want to pay to "get the band back together". At the moment that is just stuffing for my dream pipe.

Could Magnetic Scrolls have flourished if it had followed the market and developed a point-and-click game?

Knowing them as I do I would suspect they would not have embraced point and click for the reasons I stated earlier. You'd have to ask Ken and Anita about that.

With your love of the Spectrum, are you excited about the imminent launch of the Spectrum Next, and the potential of a new PAWS adventure writing system for it?



[Left] A selection of "feelies" that accompanied the game disk in the *Fish!* packaging.

I'm very interested to see the Next. It has a lot of promise for IF I think, and the interest in retro gaming can only support that. They did say they'd let me have a look at it when it comes out. I hope they remember they said that when the time comes!

So a hint at a desire to return to the genre?

After watching a film called GET LAMP [Jason Scott's 2010 documentary] recently I was all fired up to make a new IF. I even pitched a few ideas to a company called Choice Of Games but they passed on it. It's still something I think about and if I could fund it so I can take time off work for a while to do it then I'm still keen to do something more. Maybe a retirement project perhaps.

One last question – how did the agent remember anything, being a Goldfish?

One last question – how did the agent remember anything, being a Goldfish?

One last question

Oh, cool castle. Let's swim around a bit and see if we can see anything else. Oh, cool castle ... That was actually one of my original ideas for *Fish!* That didn't make the cut. The player not only is a fish they have a very short memory. I forgot that until you made that joke.



DESERT ISLAND DUNGEONS

Magnetic Scrolls alumni Phil "Snouty" South finds himself swimming with the *Fish!*, and alone on a desert island.

The Hobbit
(Melbourne House, 1982)

Because it's cool and I have countless happy memories of it.

The Pawn
(Magnetic Scrolls, 1987)

I never actually played it all the way through and on an island I'd have time

Lords of Time
(Level 9, 1988)

Because it rocks and is the first Speccy adventure I fell in love with

Zork
(Infocom, 1985)

The very first advent I ever played. The fact I call it "advent" shows my age.

Sorcerer
(Infocom, 1988)

The first Infocom game John and I played together that ever made me want to make one

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Matej Jan

Heroes of Karn and The Illustrator
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Hibernated
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Written and designed by Mark James Hardisty

About the author

Mark James Hardisty is from Sheffield. His weekly pilgrimage to Just Micro as a child left him with an indelible love for Gremlin Graphics.

You can find Mark at @hardistymark, where he tweets about games, getting kids coding, The Cannonball Run, and his favourite game - *Elite* on the Acorn Electron.

This work is dedicated to:

My wonderful family – my mum Val, my beautiful wife Helen, and daughters Amelia Rose and Kitty Mae.

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